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EN REVIEW

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Cover photograph of Jackson Pollock by Hans Namuth

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GEORGES ARNAUD is best known for his novel *The Wages of Fear*. *Les Aveux les plus doux (Sweet Confessions)* was first produced on 8 May 1953 at the Théâtre du Quartier Latin; it was directed by Michel de Ré. SAMUEL BECKETT's two latest plays, *All That Fall* and *Endgame*, have been published recently by Grove Press. E. G. BURROWS is program director for the University of Michigan Broadcasting Service (WUOM). His first volume of poems, *Arctic Tern*, was published last year. ALBERT CAMUS was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1957. His "*Refléxions sur la Guillotine*" was first printed in the June and July (1957) issues of *La Nouvelle N.R.F.* GREGORY CORSO's first book of poems, *Gasoline*, was recently published in the Pocket Poets Series (City Lights Bookshop, San Francisco). "Poets Hitchhiking on the Highway" was first printed in *Coastlines*. JAMES GRADY reads scripts for Broadway producers and writes copy. He has also written plays. CLEMENT GREENBERG'S collection of essays will be published by Beacon Press during the coming year. BARBARA GUEST is writing a play and a novel. She has published poems in *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*. EUGENE IONESCO, a leading experimental dramatist in Paris, is best known here for his *The Bald Soprano*. A volume of four of his plays will be published by Grove Press. HANS NAMUTH has also made a 16 mm. color film of Jackson Pollock, with spoken commentary by the artist. Our cover photograph is reprinted by courtesy of *Harper's Bazaar*. FRANK O'HARA is currently writing a novel and a musical comedy. His book of poems, *Meditations in an Emergency*, appeared in 1957.

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Shortly before World War I, a murderer whose crime was particularly shocking (he had killed a family of farmers, children and all) was condemned to death in Algiers. He was an agricultural worker who had slaughtered in a bloody delirium, and had rendered his offense still more serious by robbing his victims. The case was widely publicized, and it was generally agreed that decapitation was altogether too mild a punishment for such a monster. I have been told this was the opinion of my father, who was particularly outraged by the murder of the children. One of the few things I know about him is that this was the first time in his life he wanted to attend an execution. He got up while it was still dark, for the place where the guillotine was set up was at the other end of the city, and once there, found himself among a great crowd of spectators. He never told what he saw that morning. My mother could only report that he rushed wildly into the house, refused to speak, threw himself on the bed, and suddenly began to vomit. He had just discovered the reality concealed beneath the great formulas that ordinarily serve to mask it. Instead of thinking of the murdered children, he could recall only the trembling body he had seen thrown on a board to have its head chopped off.

This ritual act must indeed be horrible if it can subvert the indignation of a simple, upright man; if the punishment which he regarded as deserved a hundred times over had no other effect on him than to turn his stomach. When the supreme act of justice merely nauseates the honest citizen it is supposed to protect, it seems difficult to maintain that this act is intended—as its proper functioning *should* intend it—to confer a greater degree of peace and order upon the city. Justice of this kind is obviously no less shocking than the crime itself, and the new "official" murder, far from offering redress for the offense committed against society, adds in-

stead a second defilement to the first. This is so apparent that no one dares speak openly of the ritual act itself. The officials and the journalists whose responsibility it is to speak of it, as if conscious of the simultaneously provocative and shameful aspects of such justice, have devised a kind of ceremonial language for dealing with it, a language reduced to the most stereotyped formulas. Over breakfast we may read, on some back page of our newspaper, that the condemned man "paid his debt to society," that he "expiated his crime," or that "at five o'clock this morning justice was done." Officials deal with this man as "the accused," "the patient," or merely refer to him as the C.A.M. (*Condamné à mort*). Capital punishment, one might say, is written about only in whispers. In a highly organized society such as ours we acknowledge a disease is serious by the fact that we do not dare speak of it openly. In middle-class families, it was long the rule to say that the oldest daughter had a "weak chest," or that Papa suffered from a "growth": to have tuberculosis or cancer was regarded as something of a disgrace. This is even more certainly true in the case of capital punishment: everyone does his best to speak of it only in euphemisms. The death penalty is to the body politic what cancer is to the individual body, with perhaps the single difference that no one has ever spoken of the necessity of cancer. Yet we do not usually hesitate to describe the death penalty as a *regrettable necessity*, justifying the fact that we are killing someone because it is "necessary," and then not speaking of what we are doing because it is "regrettable."

My intention, on the contrary, is to speak of it crudely. Not out of a taste for scandal, and not, I think, because I am morbidly inclined. As a writer I have always abhorred a certain eagerness to please, and as a man I believe that the repulsive aspects of our condition, if they are inevitable, must be confronted in silence. But since silence, or the casuistry of speech, is now contributing to the support of an abuse that

must be reformed, or of a misery that can be relieved, there is no other solution than to speak out, to expose the obscenity hiding beneath our cloak of words. France shares with Spain and England the splendid distinction of being among the last countries on this side of the iron curtain to retain the death penalty in its arsenal of repression. This primitive rite survives in our country only because an ignorant and unconcerned public opinion has no other way to express itself than by using the same ceremonial phrases with which it has been indoctrinated: when the imagination is not functioning, words lack the resonance of their meanings and a deaf public scarcely registers a man's condemnation to death. But expose the machinery, make people touch the wood and the iron, let them hear the thud of heads falling, and a suddenly aroused public imagination will repudiate both vocabulary and punishment alike.

When the Nazis staged public executions of hostages in Poland, they first gagged their prisoners with rags soaked in plaster so they could not cry out some final word of liberty or rebellion. It may seem an effrontery to compare the fate of these innocent victims with that of our condemned criminals, but apart from the fact that it is not only criminals who are guillotined in France, the method is the same: we gag our guilty with a stuffing of words, though we cannot justly affirm the legitimacy of their punishment unless we have first considered its reality. Instead of saying, as we always have, that the death penalty is first of all a necessity, and afterwards that it is advisable not to talk about it, we should first speak of what the death penalty really is, and only then decide if, *being what it is,* it is necessary.

Speaking for myself, I believe the death penalty is not only useless but profoundly harmful, and I must record this conviction here before proceeding to the subject itself. It would not be honest to allow it to appear as if I had arrived at this conclusion solely as a result of the weeks of inquiry and in-

vestigation I have just devoted to the question. But it would be equally dishonest to attribute my conviction to sentimentality alone. I stand as far as possible from that position of spineless pity in which our humanitarians take such pride, in which values and responsibilities change places, all crimes become equal, and innocence ultimately forfeits all rights. I do not believe, contrary to many of my illustrious contemporaries, that man is by nature a social animal; the opposite, I think, is probably nearer the truth. I believe only that man cannot now live outside a society whose laws are necessary to his physical survival, which is a very different thing. I believe that responsibility must be established according to a reasonable and effective scale of values by society itself. But the law finds its final justification in the benefit it provides, or does not provide, the society of a given place and time. For years I have not been able to regard the death penalty as anything but a punishment intolerable to the imagination: a public sin of sloth which my reason utterly condemns. I was nevertheless prepared to believe that my imagination influenced my judgment. But during these weeks of research, I have found nothing which has modified my reasoning, nothing which has not, in all honesty, reinforced my original conviction. On the contrary. I have found new arguments to add to those I already possessed; today I share Arthur Koestler's conclusion without qualification: capital punishment is a disgrace to our society which its partisans cannot reasonably justify.

It is well known that the major argument of those who support capital punishment is its value as an *example*. We do not chop off heads merely to punish their former owners, but to intimidate, by a terrifying example, those who might be tempted to imitate their actions. Society does not take revenge—society merely protects itself. We brandish the newly severed head so that the next prospective murderer may therein

read his future and renounce his intentions. All of which would indeed be an impressive argument if one were not obliged to remark: (1) That society itself does not believe in the value of this much advertised example. (2) That it has not been ascertained whether capital punishment ever made a single determined murderer renounce his intentions, while it is certain that its effect has been one of fascination upon thousands of criminals. (3) That the death penalty constitutes, from other points of view, a loathsome example of which the consequences are unforeseeable.

First of all, then, society does not believe its own words. If it did, we would be shown the heads. Executions would be given the same promotional campaign ordinarily reserved for government loans or a new brand of *apéritif*. Yet it is well known on the contrary, that in France executions no longer take place in public—they are perpetrated in prison yards before an audience limited to specialists. It is less well known why this should be so, and since when it has been so. The last public execution took place in 1939—the guillotining of Weidmann, a murderer several times over whose exploits had brought him much notoriety. On the morning of his execution, a huge crowd rushed to Versailles; many photographers attended the ceremony and were permitted to take photographs from the time Weidmann was exposed to the crowd until the moment he was decapitated. A few hours later *Paris-Soir* published a full page of pictures of this appetizing event, and the good people of Paris were able to discover that the lightweight precision instrument used by their executioner was as different from the scaffold of their history books as a Jaguar is from an old de Dion-Bouton. The officials connected with the event and the government itself, contrary to every hope, regarded this excellent publicity in a very dim light, declaring that the press had only appealed to the most sadistic impulses of its readers. It was therefore decided that the public would no longer be permitted to witness execu-

tions, an arrangement which, shortly afterwards, made the work of the Occupation authorities considerably easier.

Logic, in this case, was not on the side of the lawmakers. Logically, in fact, they should have voted a medal to the editor of *Paris-Soir* and encouraged his staff to do still better next time. If punishment is to be exemplary, then the number of newspaper photographs must be multiplied, the instrument in question must be set up on a platform in the Place de la Concorde at two in the afternoon, the entire population of the city must be invited, and the ceremony must be televised for those unable to attend. Either do this, or stop talking about the value of an example. How can a furtive murder committed by night in a prison yard serve as an example? At best it can periodically admonish the citizenry that they will die if they commit murder; a fate which can also be assured them if they do not. For punishment to be truly exemplary, it must be terrifying. Tuaut de la Bouverie, representative of the people in 1791 and a partisan of public execution, spoke more logically when he declared to the National Assembly: "There must be terrible spectacles in order to control the people."

Today there is no spectacle at all—only a penalty known to everyone by hearsay and, at long intervals, the announcement of an execution couched in soothing formulas. How shall a future criminal, in the very act of committing his crime, keep in mind a threat which has been made increasingly abstract by every possible effort? And if it is really desirable that the incipient murderer preserve a vision of his ultimate fate that might counterbalance and ultimately reverse his criminal intent, then why do we not burn the reality of that fate into his sensibility by every means of language and image within our power?

Instead of vaguely evoking a debt that someone has paid to society this morning, would it not be more politic—if we are interested in setting an example—to profit by this excellent opportunity to remind each taxpayer in detail just

what sort of punishment he can expect? Instead of saying, "If you kill someone you will pay for it on the scaffold," would it not be more politic—if we are interested in setting an example—to say instead: "If you kill someone, you will be thrown into prison for months or even years, torn between an impossible despair and a constantly renewed fear, until one morning we will sneak into your cell, having taken off our shoes in order to surprise you in your sleep, which has at last overcome you after the night's anguish. We will throw ourselves upon you, tie your wrists behind your back, and with a pair of scissors cut away your shirt collar and your hair, if it should be in the way. Because we are perfectionists we will lash your arms together with a strap so that your body will be arched to offer unhampered access to the back of your neck. Then we will carry you, one man holding you up under each arm, your feet dragging behind you, down the long corridors, until, under the night sky, one of the executioners will at last take hold of the back of your trousers and throw you down on a board, another will make sure your head is in the lunette, and a third one will drop, from a height of two meters twenty centimeters, a blade weighing sixty kilograms that will slice through your neck like a razor." [1]

For the example to be even better, for the terror it breeds to become in each of us a force blind enough and powerful enough to balance, at the right moment, our irresistible desire to kill, we must go still further. Instead of bragging, with our characteristic pretentious ignorance, that we have invented a swift and humane[2] means of killing those condemned to death, we should publish in millions of copies, read out in every school and college, the eyewitness accounts and medical reports that describe the state of the body after execution. We should particularly recommend the printing and circulation of a recent communication made to the Academy of Medicine by Doctors Piedelièvre and Fournier. These courageous phy-

[1] Notes for this essay are given on pages 54-55.

sicians, having examined, in the interests of science, the bodies of the condemned after execution, have considered it their duty to sum up their terrible observations thus: "If we may be permitted to present our opinion on this subject, such spectacles are horribly painful. The blood rushes from the vessels according to the rhythm of the severed carotids, then coagulates. The muscles contract and their fibrillation is stupefying. The intestine undulates and the heart produces a series of irregular, incomplete, and convulsive movements. The mouth tightens, at certain moments, into a dreadful grimace. It is true that the eyes of a decapitated head are immobile, the pupils dilated; fortunately, they cannot see, and if they exhibit no signs of disturbance, none of the characteristic opalescence of a cadaver, they at least have no capacity for movement: their transparency is that of life, but their fixity is mortal. All this may last minutes, even hours, in a healthy subject: death is not immediate. . . . Thus each vital element survives decapitation to some extent. There remains, for the physician, the impression of a hideous experiment, a murderous vivisection followed by a premature burial." [3]

I doubt that many readers can read this dreadful report without blanching. We can, in fact, count on its power as an example, its capacity to intimidate. What is to prevent us from adding to it the reports of witnesses that further authenticate the observations of medical men. If the severed head of Charlotte Corday is supposed to have blushed under the executioner's hand, we shall hardly be surprised after examining the accounts of more recent observers. Here is how one assistant executioner, hardly likely to cultivate the sentimental or romantic aspects of his trade, describes what he has been obliged to see: "There was one wild man, suffering from a real fit of delirium tremens, whom we had to throw under the knife. The head died right away. But the body literally sprang into the basket, where it lay struggling against the cords that bound it. Twenty minutes later, in the cemetery, it was still

shuddering." [4] The present chaplain of La Santé, the reverend father Devoyod, who does not appear to be opposed to the death penalty, tells, nevertheless, the following remarkable story in his book *Les Délinquants*[5] (which renews the famous episode of a man named Languille whose severed head answered to its name[6]): "The morning of the execution, the condemned man was in a very bad humor, and refused to receive the succor of religion. Knowing the depths of his heart and his true regard for his wife, whose sentiments were genuinely Christian, we said to him, 'For the love of this woman, commune with yourself a moment before you die.' And the condemned man consented, communing at length before the crucifix, and afterwards scarcely seemed to notice our presence. When he was executed, we were not far from him; his head fell onto the trough in front of the guillotine, and the body was immediately put into the basket. But contrary to custom, the basket was closed before the head could be put in. The assistant carrying the head had to wait a moment until the basket was opened again. And during that brief space of time, we were able to see the two eyes of the condemned man fixed on us in a gaze of supplication, as if to ask our forgiveness. Instinctively we traced a sign of the cross in order to bless the head, and then the eyelids blinked, the look in the eyes became gentle again, and then the gaze, which had remained expressive, was gone. . . ." The reader will accept or reject the explanation proposed by the priest according to his faith. But at least those eyes that "remained expressive" need no interpretation.

I could cite many other eyewitness accounts as hallucinatory as these. But as for myself, I hardly need or know how to go further. After all, I make no claim that the death penalty is exemplary: indeed, this torture affects me only as what it is—a crude surgery practiced in conditions that deprive it of any edifying character whatsoever. Society, on the other hand, and the State (which has seen other tortures) can

easily bear such details; and since they favor preaching examples, they might as well make them universally known so that a perpetually terrorized populace can become Franciscan to a man. For who is it we think we are frightening by this example constantly screened from view; by the threat of a punishment described as painless, expedient, and on the whole less disagreeable than cancer; by a torture crowned with all the flowers of rhetoric? Certainly not those who pass for honest (and some are) because they are asleep at such an hour, to whom the *great example* has not been revealed, and who drink their morning coffee at the hour of the premature burial, informed of the operation of justice, if they happen to read the newspapers, by a mealy-mouthed bulletin that dissolves like sugar in their memory. Yet these same peaceful creatures furnish society with the largest percentage of its homicides. Many of these honest men are criminals without knowing it. According to one magistrate, the overwhelming majority of the murderers he had tried did not know, when they shaved themselves that morning, that they were going to kill someone that night. For the sake of example and security alike, we should brandish rather than disguise the agonized face of our victim before the eyes of every man as he shaves himself in the morning.

This is not done. The State conceals the circumstances and even the existence of its executions, keeps silent about such reports and such accounts. It does not concern itself with the exemplary value of punishment save by tradition, nor does it trouble to consider the present meaning of its act. The criminal is killed because he has been killed for centuries, and furthermore he is killed according to a procedure established at the end of the eighteenth century. The same arguments that have served as legal tender for centuries are perpetuated as a matter of routine, contradicted only by those measures which the evolution of public sensibility renders inevitable. The law is applied without consideration of its significance,

and our condemned criminals die by rote in the name of a theory in which their executioners no longer believe. If they believed in it, it would be known, and above all it would be seen. But such publicity, beyond the fact that it arouses sadistic instincts of which the repercussions are incalculable and which end, one day or another, by satisfying themselves with yet another murder, also risks provoking the disgust and revolt of public opinion itself. It would become more difficult to execute by assembly line, as we do in France at this very moment, if such executions were translated into the bold images of popular fantasy. The very man who enjoys his morning coffee while reading that justice has been done would certainly choke on it at the slightest of such details. And the texts I have quoted may go far toward supporting the position of certain professors of criminal law who, in their evident incapacity to justify the anachronism of capital punishment, console themselves by declaring with the sociologist Tarde that it is better to kill without causing suffering than it is to cause suffering without killing. Which is why we can only approve the position of Gambetta, who as an adversary of the death penalty nevertheless voted against a bill proposing the exclusion of the public from executions, asserting: "If you do away with the horror of the spectacle, if you perform executions in the prison yards, you will also do away with the public reaction of revolt which has shown itself in recent years, and thereby establish the death penalty all the more firmly."

We must either kill publicly, or admit we do not feel authorized to kill. If society justifies the death penalty as a necessary example, then it must justify itself by providing the publicity necessary to *make* an example. Society must display the executioner's hands on each occasion, and require the most squeamish citizens to look at them, as well as those who, directly or remotely, have supported the work of those hands from the first. Otherwise society confesses that it kills without

consciousness of what it does or what it says; or that it kills yet knows, too, that far from intimidating belief, these disgusting ceremonies can only awaken a sense of criminality, and thoroughly undermine public morale. Who could be more explicit than a judge at the end of his career?—Counselor Falco's courageous confession deserves careful attention: "On only one occasion during my years on the bench I recommended a verdict in favor of execution of the accused and against the commutation of his punishment; I decided that despite my position I would attend the ceremony—with complete objectivity, of course. The man in question was not at all sympathetic, not even interesting: he had brutally murdered his little daughter and then thrown her body down a well. Nevertheless, after his execution, for weeks, and even for months, my nights were haunted by this memory. . . . I served in the war like everyone else, and I saw an innocent generation killed before my eyes; yet confronted with the memory of that dreadful spectacle, I still can say I never once experienced the same kind of bad conscience I felt as I watched the kind of administrative assassination known as capital punishment."[7]

But after all, why should society believe in the value of such an example, since it does not affect the incidence of crime, and since its effects, if they exist at all, are invisible? For capital punishment cannot intimidate a man who does not know he is going to commit murder, who decides on it in an instant and prepares his action in the heat of passion or an *idée fixe;* cannot intimidate a man who starts off for an assignation carrying with him a weapon to frighten his faithless mistress or his rival and then, at the last minute, makes use of it, although without any such intention—or without thinking he had any such intention. In short, capital punishment cannot intimidate the man who throws himself upon crime as one throws oneself into misery. Which is to say that it is ineffective in the majority of cases. It is only fair to point out that in France, at least, capital punishment is rarely applied in cases

of "crimes of passion." Yet even "rarely" is enough to make one shudder.

But does the death penalty act as a deterrent, at least, upon that "race" of criminals it claims to affect—those who live by crime? Nothing is less certain. Arthur Koestler reminds us that in the period when pickpockets were punished by hanging in England, other thieves exercised their talents in the crowds surrounding the scaffold where their fellow was being hanged. Statistics compiled during the past fifty years in England show that out of 250 men hanged, 170 had previously attended one or even two public executions. Even as late as 1886, out of 167 men condemned to death in the Bristol prison, 164 had attended at least one execution. Figures corresponding to these cannot be ascertained in France because of the secrecy which surrounds executions here. But those we have remind us that in that crowd my father stood among to watch a public execution, there must have been a considerable number of future criminals who did not run home and vomit. The power of intimidation operates only on those timid souls who are not dedicated to crime, and gives way before precisely those incorrigibles whom it is concerned to correct.

Yet it cannot be denied that men fear death. The deprivation of life is certainly the supreme punishment, and arouses in each of us his decisive fear. The fear of death, rising from the obscurest depths, ravages the self; the instinct for life, when threatened, panics and flounders among the most dreadful agonies. The legislator may with some justice assume that his law affects one of the most mysterious and powerful motives of human nature. But the law is always simpler than nature. When, in its attempt to establish its sovereignty, the law ventures into the blind realms of being, it runs a terrible risk of being impotent to control the very complexity it attempts to set in order.

Indeed if the fear of death is one kind of evidence, the fact that this same fear, no matter how great it may be, has

never sufficed to discourage human passions, is still another. Bacon was right: no passion is so weak that it cannot confront and master the fear of death. Vengeance, love, honor, grief, even fear of something else—all are victorious over the fear of death in one circumstance or another. And shall cupidity, hatred, or jealousy not accomplish all that love or patriotism or the human passion for liberty are able to achieve? For centuries the death penalty, often acccompanied by various barbarous refinements, has tried to restrain the incidence of crime; yet crime persists. Why? Because the instincts which confront and war against each other within man are not, as the law would have them, constant forces in a state of equilibrium. They are variable forces that die and triumph one after another, whose successive imbalances nourish the life of the mind in the same way that electrical oscillations, occurring with sufficient frequency, establish a current. Consider the series of oscillations passing from desire to satiation, from decision to renunciation, which all of us experience in a single day and then multiply these variations to infinity and we may form an idea of the extent of our psychological proliferation. These imbalances, these disequilibriums are generally too fugitive to permit any one force to gain control of the entire self. Yet it sometimes happens that a single element of the soul's resources can break free and occupy the entire field of consciousness; no instinct, even that of self-preservation, can then oppose the tyranny of this irresistible force. In order that the death penalty be really intimidating, human nature itself would have to be different from what it is, would have to be as stable and serene as the law itself. It would no longer be life, but still-life.

But life is not still-life, is not stable, not serene. Which is why, surprising as it may seem to those who have not observed or experienced in themselves the complexity of the human situation, the murderer for the most part considers himself innocent when he commits his crime. Before being

judged, the criminal acquits *himself*. He feels he is—if not entirely within his rights—at least extenuated by circumstances. He does not reflect; he does not foresee; or if he does, it is only to foresee that he will be pardoned—altogether or in part. Why should he fear what he regards as highly unlikely? He will fear death after being judged, not before his crime. Therefore, in order to intimidate effectively, the law must permit the murderer *no escape*, must be implacable *in advance*, must admit no possibility of an extenuating circumstance. Who among us would dare to demand this?

And even if we did, there is still another paradox of human nature to consider. The instinct of self-preservation, if it is a fundamental one, is no more so than that other instinct less often discussed by academic psychologists: the death instinct which at certain times demands the destruction of the self or of others. It is probable that the desire to kill frequently coincides with the desire to die or to kill oneself.[8] The instinct of self-preservation thus finds itself confronted in variable proportions by the instinct for self-destruction. The latter is the only means by which we can altogether explain the numerous perversions which—from alcoholism to drug addiction—lead the self to a destruction of which it cannot long remain ignorant. Man desires to live, but it is vain to hope that this desire can control all his actions. He desires to be annihilated as well—he wills the irreparable, death for its own sake. It so happens that the criminal desires not only his crime, but the misery that accompanies it, especially if this misery is unbounded and inordinate. When this perverse desire grows until it gains control of the self, the prospect of being put to death is not only impotent to restrain the criminal, but probably deepens even further the abyss into which he plunges: there are situations in which one kills in order to die.

Such singularities suffice to explain how a punishment that seems calculated to intimidate the normal mind has in reality nothing whatever to do with ordinary psychological processes.

All statistics show, without exception—in the countries which have abolished it, as well as in the others—that there is no connection between the death penalty and the incidence of crime.[9] This incidence, in fact, neither rises nor falls. The guillotine exists; crime exists: between them there is no other apparent connection than that of the law. All we are entitled to conclude from the figures provided by statisticians is this: for centuries crimes other than murder were punished by death, and this supreme punishment, deliberately repeated, caused none of these crimes to disappear. For several centuries these crimes have no longer been punished by death, yet they have not increased in number, and the incidence of some has even diminished. Similarly, murder has been punished by capital punishment for centuries, yet the race of Cain has not disappeared from the earth. In the thirty-three nations that have abolished the death penalty or no longer impose it, the number of murders has not increased. How can we therefore conclude that the death penalty is really intimidating?

Its partisans can deny neither these facts nor these figures. Their only and ultimate reply is significant; it explains the paradoxical attitude of a society which so carefully conceals the executions it claims as exemplary: "It is true that nothing proves that the death penalty is exemplary; it is even certain that thousands of murderers have not been intimidated by it. But we cannot know who *has* been intimidated by such a penalty; consequently, nothing proves that it does not serve as an example." Thus the greatest of all punishments, the penalty that involves the ultimate forfeiture of the condemned man and concedes the supreme privilege to society, rests on nothing more than an unverifiable possibility. Death, however, does not admit of degrees of likelihood; it fixes all things—blame and body alike—in its definitive rigidity. Yet it is administered in our country in the name of a possibility, a calculation of likelihood. And even if this possibility should be

reasonable, would it not have to be certitude itself to authorize certain and absolute extinction? Yet the man we condemn to die is cut in two not so much for the crime he has committed as for the sake of all the crimes that might have happened, but which *have not* happened—which could occur, but somehow *will not* occur. Hence, the greatest possible uncertainty appears to authorize the most implacable certitude of all.

I am not the only one to be astonished by this dangerous contradiction. The State itself disapproves, and its bad conscience explains in turn all the contradictions of the official attitude. This attitude suppresses the publicity of executions because it cannot affirm, faced with the facts, that they have ever served to intimidate criminals. It cannot escape the dilemma which Beccaria had already pointed to when he wrote: "If it is important to show the people frequent proof of power, then executions must be frequent; but in that case crimes must be frequent too, which will prove that the death penalty is far from making the desired impression; thus this penalty is at the same time useless and necessary." What can the State do about a punishment both useless and necessary, except conceal it without abolishing it? And so it will be preserved in obscurity, continued with perplexity and hesitation, in the blind hope that one man at least, one day at least, will be intimidated by consideration of the punishment that lies ahead, and will abandon his murderous intent, thereby justifying, though no one will ever know it, a law which has no support in reason or experience. To persist in its claim that the guillotine is exemplary, the State must raise the incidence of real murders in order to avoid an unknown murder of which it cannot be sure (will never be sure) that it would ever have been committed at all. Is it not a strange law, that recognizes the murder it commits, and remains forever ignorant of the crime it prevents?

But what will remain of this power of example, if it is

proved that capital punishment has another power, this one quite real, which degrades men to the worst excesses of shame, madness, and murder?

The exemplary effects of these ceremonies can readily be traced in public opinion—the manifestations of sadism they reveal, the terrible notoriety they arouse in the case of certain criminals. Instead of an operatic nobility of attitude at the foot of the scaffold, we find nothing but disgust, contempt, or perverse pleasure. The effects are well known. Propriety too has had its share in effecting the removal of the scaffold from the square in front of the city hall to the city walls, and from the walls to the prison yard. We are less well informed about the sentiments of those whose business it is to attend this kind of spectacle. Let us listen to the words of the director of an English prison, who speaks of "an acute sense of personal shame," of a prison chaplain who speaks of "horror, shame, and humiliation";[10] and let us consider especially the feelings of the man who kills because it is his trade—I mean the executioner. What shall we think of these civil servants of ours, who refer to the guillotine as "the bike," the condemned man as "the client" or "luggage," except, in the words of the priest Bela Just, who served as prison chaplain for more than thirty executions, that "The idiom of the executors of justice yields nothing in point of cynicism or vulgarity to that of its violators."[11] Here, furthermore, are the reflections of one of our assistant executioners on his official travels across the country: "When it came time for our trips to the provinces, the real fun began: taxis, good restaurants, everything we wanted!"[12] The same man, boasting of the executioner's skill in releasing the knife, says: "One can *indulge oneself in the luxury* of pulling the client's hair." The depravity expressed here has other, more profound aspects. The clothing of the condemned man belongs, by custom, to the executioner. We learn that old father Deibler hung all the clothing he had col-

lected in a shack and that he used *to go look at his collection from time to time*. There are more serious examples. Here is our assistant executioner again: "The new executioner has guillotine fever. Sometimes he stays at home for days at a time, sitting in a chair, ready to go, his hat on his head, his overcoat on, waiting for a summons from the public prosecutor."[13]

And this is the man of whom Joseph de Maistre said that his very existence was accorded by a special decree of divine power and that without him, "order gives way to chaos, thrones collapse, and society disappears." This is the man by means of whom society gets rid of its culprit, and once the executioner signs the prison release, he is permitted to walk out, a free man. The honorable and solemn example, as conceived by our legislation, has had one certain effect, at least—it perverts or destroys the human quality and reason of all who participate in it directly. It will be objected that we are discussing only a few exceptional creatures who make a living out of such degradation. There might be fewer protests if it were known that there are hundreds of men who offer their services as executioner *without pay*. Men of my generation, who have survived the history of our times, will not be surprised to learn this. They know that behind the most familiar, the most peaceful face lies the instinct to torture and to kill. The punishment which claims to intimidate an unknown murderer unquestionably provides a number of known monsters with their vocation as killers. Since we are not above justifying our cruellest laws by considerations of probability, let us not hesitate to admit that out of these hundreds of men whose services are refused, one, at least, has satisfied in some other way the bloody impulses which the guillotine awakened within him.

If we are to maintain the death penalty, let us at least be spared the hypocrisy of justification by example. Let us call by its right name this penalty about which all publicity is suppressed, this intimidation which does not operate upon honest men to the degree that they are honest, which fasci-

nates those who have ceased to be honest, and which degrades and disorders those who lend their hands to it. It is a punishment, certainly, a dreadful physical and moral torture, but one offering no certain example save that of demoralization. It forbids, but it prevents nothing—when it does not in fact arouse the will to murder itself. It is *as if it were not*, except for the man who suffers it—in his soul for months or years, and in his body during the desperate and violent moment when he is cut in two without being altogether deprived of life. Let us call it by a name which, lacking all patents of nobility, at least provides that of truth—let us recognize it for what it ultimately is: a revenge.

Punishment, penalizing rather than preventing, is a form of revenge: society's semiarithmetical answer to violation of its primordial law. This answer is as old as man himself, and usually goes by the name of *retaliation*. He who hurts me must be hurt; who blinds me in one eye must himself lose an eye; who takes a life must die. It is a feeling, and a particularly violent one, which is involved here, not a principle. Retaliation belongs to the order of nature, of instinct, not to the order of law. The law by definition cannot abide by the same rules as nature. If murder is part of man's nature, the law is not made to imitate or reproduce such nature. We have all known the impulse to retaliate, often to our shame, and we know its power: the power of the primeval forests. In this regard, we live—as Frenchmen who grow justifiably indignant at seeing the oil king of Saudi Arabia preach international democracy while entrusting his butcher with the task of cutting off a thief's hand—in a kind of middle ages ourselves, without even the consolations of faith. Yet if we still define our justice according to the calculations of a crude arithmetic,[14] can we at least affirm that this arithmetic is correct, and that even such elementary justice, limited as it is to a form

of legal revenge, is *safeguarded* by the death penalty? The answer must again be: No.

We scarcely need to point out how inapplicable the law of retaliation has become in our society: it is as excessive to punish the pyromaniac by setting his house on fire as it is insufficient to punish the thief by deducting from his bank account a sum equivalent to the amount he has stolen. Let us admit instead that it is just and even necessary to compensate the murder of the victim by the death of the murderer. But capital punishment is not merely death. It is as different, in its essence, from the suppression of life as a concentration camp from a prison. It is undeniably a murder which arithmetically cancels out the murder already committed; but it also adds a regularization of death, a public premeditation of which its future victims are informed, an *organization* which in itself is a source of moral suffering more terrible than death. There is thus no real compensation, no equivalence. Many systems of law regard a premeditated crime as more serious than a crime of pure violence. But what is capital punishment if not the most premeditated of murders, to which no criminal act, no matter how calculated, can be compared? If there were to be a real equivalence, the death penalty would have to be pronounced upon a criminal who had forewarned his victim of the very moment he would put him to a horrible death, and who, from that time on, had kept him confined at his own discretion for a period of months. It is not in private life that one meets such monsters.

Here again, when our official jurists speak of death without suffering, they do not know what they are talking about, and furthermore they betray a remarkable lack of imagination. The devastating, degrading fear imposed on the condemned man for months or even years[15] is a punishment more terrible than death itself, and one that has not been imposed on his victim. A murdered man is generally rushed to his death, even at the

height of his terror of the mortal violence being done to him, without knowing what is happening: the period of his horror is only that of his life itself, and his hope of escaping whatever madness has pounced upon him probably never deserts him. For the man condemned to death, on the other hand, the horror of his situation is served up to him at every moment for months on end. Torture by hope alternates only with the pangs of animal despair. His lawyer and his confessor, out of simple humanity, and his guards, to keep him docile, unanimously assure him that he will be reprieved. He believes them with all his heart, yet he cannot believe them at all. He hopes by day, despairs by night.[16] And as the weeks pass his hope and despair increase proportionately, until they become equally insupportable. According to all accounts, the color of his skin changes: fear acts like an acid. "It's nothing to know you're going to die," one such man in the Fresnes prison said, "but not to know if you're going to live is the real torture." At the moment of his execution Cartouche remarked, "Bah! a nasty quarter of an hour and it's all over." But it takes months, not minutes. The condemned man knows long in advance that he is going to be killed and that all that can save him is a reprieve which operates, so far as he is concerned, like the will of heaven itself. In any case he cannot intervene, plead for himself: he is no longer a man, but a thing waiting to be manipulated by the executioners. He is kept in a state of absolute necessity, the condition of inert matter, yet within him is the consciousness that is his principal enemy.

When the officials whose trade is to kill such a man refer to him as "luggage," they know what they are saying: to be unable to react to the hand that moves you, holds you, or lets you drop—is that not the condition of some package, some *thing*, or better still, some trapped animal? Yet an animal in a trap can starve itself to death; the man condemned to death cannot. He is provided with a special diet

(at Fresnes, diet No. 4 with *extras* of milk, wine, sugar, preserves, and butter); he is encouraged to eat well—if necessary he is forced to eat. The animal must be in good condition for the kill. The thing—the animal—has a right only to those corrupted privileges known as caprices. "You'd be surprised how sensitive they are!" declared one sergeant at Fresnes without a trace of irony. Sensitive? Unquestionably—how else recover the freedom and dignity of will that man cannot live without? Sensitive or not, from the moment the death sentence is pronounced, the condemned man becomes part of an imperturbable mechanism. He spends several weeks within the cogs and gears of a machine that controls his every gesture, ultimately delivering him to the hands that will lay him out on the last device of all. The luggage is no longer subjected to the operations of chance, the hazards that dominate the existence of a living being, but to mechanical laws that permit him to foresee in the minutest perspective the day of his decapitation.

His condition as an object comes to an end on this day. During the three-quarters of an hour that separates him from his extinction, the certainty of his futile death overcomes everything: the fettered, utterly submissive creature experiences a hell that makes a mockery of the one with which he is threatened. For all their hemlock, the Greeks were humane: they provided their criminals a relative liberty at least, the possibility of postponing or advancing the hour of their own death; and of choosing between suicide and execution. For reasons of security, we carry out our justice by ourselves. Yet there could not be real justice in such cases unless the murderer, having made known his decision months in advance, had entered his victim's house, tied him up securely, informed him he would be put to death in the next hour, and then used this hour to set up the apparatus by which his victim would be despatched. What criminal has ever reduced his victim to a condition so desperate, so hopeless, and so powerless?

This doubtless explains the strange quality of submission that is so often observed in the condemned man at the moment of his execution. After all, those who have nothing to lose by it might make a last desperate effort, preferring to die by a stray bullet or to be guillotined in a violent struggle that would numb every sense: it would be a kind of freedom in dying. And yet, with very few exceptions, the condemned man walks quite docilely to his death in dismal impassivity. Which must be what our journalists mean when they tell us the condemned man died courageously. What they *really* mean, of course, is that the condemned man made no trouble, no attempt to abandon his status as luggage, and that we are all grateful to him for his good behavior. In so disgraceful a business the accused has shown a commendable sense of propriety in allowing the disgrace to be disposed of as soon as possible. But the compliments and character references are just another part of the general mystification that surrounds the death penalty. For the condemned man often behaves "properly" only to the degree that he is afraid, and deserves the eulogies of our press only if his fear or his despair are sufficiently great to sterilize him altogether. Let me not be misunderstood: some men—political prisoners or not—die heroically, and we must speak of them with the admiration and respect they deserve. But the majority of those condemned to death know no other silence than that of fear, no other impassivity than that of horror, and it seems to me that the silence of fear and horror deserves still more respect than the other. When the priest Bela Just offerd to write to the relatives of one young criminal only a few minutes before he was to be hung, and received these words in answer: "I don't have the courage, not even for that," one wonders how a priest, at such a confession of weakness, could keep from falling on his knees before what is most miserable and most sacred in man. As for those who do not talk, those who show us what they have gone through only by the puddle they leave in the place they

are dragged from, who would dare say they died as cowards? And by what name shall we call those who have brought these men to their "cowardice"? After all, each murderer, at the moment of his crime, runs the risk of the most terrible death, while those who execute him risk nothing, except perhaps a promotion.

No—what the condemned man experiences at this moment is beyond all morality. Neither virtue, nor courage, nor intelligence, not even innocence has a share in his condition at that moment. Society is reduced at one blow to that condition of primitive terror in which nothing can be judged and all equity, all dignity, have vanished. "The sense of his own innocence does not immunize the executed man against the cruelty of his death. . . . I have seen terrible criminals die courageously, and innocent men walk to the knife trembling in every limb."[17] When the same witness adds that, in his experience, such failures of nerve are more frequent among intellectuals, he does not mean that this category of men has less courage than any other, but that they have more imagination. Confronted with an inescapable death, a man, no matter what his convictions, is devastated throughout his entire system.[18] The sense of powerlessness and solitude of the fettered prisoner, confronted by the public coalition which has *willed* his death, is in itself an unimaginable punishment. In this regard, too, it would be far better if the execution were held in public: the actor that is in every man could then come to the aid of the stricken animal, could help him keep up a front, even in his own eyes. But the darkness and the secrecy of the ceremony are without appeal: in such a disaster, courage, the soul's consistency, faith itself—all are merely matters of chance. As a general rule, the man is destroyed by waiting for his execution long before he is actually killed. Two deaths are imposed, and the first is worse than the second, though the culprit has killed but once. Compared to this torture, the law of retaliation seems like a civilized principle. For that law, at least,

has never claimed that a man must be blinded in both eyes to pay for having blinded his brother in one.

This fundamental injustice, moreover, has its repercussions among the relatives of the man who is executed. The victim has his relatives too, whose sufferings are generally infinite and who, for the most part, wish to be revenged. They *are* revenged, in the manner I have described, but the relatives of the executed man thereby experience a misery that punishes them beyond the bounds of all justice. A mother's or a father's expectation during the endless months, the prison parlor, the awkward conversations which fill the brief minutes they are allowed to spend with the condemned man, the images of the execution itself—all are tortures that have not been inflicted on the relatives of the victim. Whatever the feelings of the latter, they cannot require their revenge to exceed the crime to such an extent, and torment those who violently share their own grief. "I have been reprieved, Father," writes one man condemned to death, "and I still don't really believe in my good luck. The reprieve was signed April 30, and they told me Wednesday, on my way back from the parlor. I sent them to tell Papa and Mama, who had not yet left the prison. You can imagine their happiness."[19] We can imagine their happiness only to the degree that we can imagine their unceasing misery until the moment of the reprieve, and the utter despair of those who receive another kind of news, the kind that unjustly punishes their innocence and their misery.

As for the law of retaliation, it must be admitted that even in its primitive form it is legitimate only between two individuals of whom one is absolutely innocent and the other absolutely guilty. Certainly the victim is innocent. But can society, which is supposed to represent the victim, claim a comparable innocence? Is it not responsible, at least in part, for the crime which it represses with such severity? This theme has been frequently developed elsewhere, and I need not con-

tinue a line of argument which the most varied minds have elaborated since the eighteenth century. Its principal features can be summed up, in any case, by observing that every society has the criminals it deserves. As far as France is concerned, however, it is impossible not to draw attention to circumstances which might make our legislators more modest. Answering a questionnaire on capital punishment in *Figaro* in 1952, a colonel declared that the establishment of perpetual forced labor as the supreme penalty amounted to the same thing as the establishment of schools of crime. This superior officer seems to be unaware—and I am happy for his sake—that we already have our schools of crime, which differ in one particular from our reformatories—that fact that one can leave them at any hour of the day or night: they are our bars and our slums, the glories of our republic. And on this point, at least, it is impossible to express oneself with moderation.

According to statistics, there are 64,000 overcrowded living accommodations (three to five persons to a room) in the city of Paris alone. Now of course the man who murders children is a particularly unspeakable creature, scarcely worth working up much pity over. It is probable, too (I say probable), that none of my readers, placed in the same promiscuous living conditions, would go so far as to murder children: there is no question of reducing the guilt of such monsters. But would such monsters, in decent living conditions, have an occasion to go so far? The least one can say is that they are not the only guilty parties: it is difficult to account for the fact that the right to punish these criminals is given to the very men who prefer to subsidize sugar beets rather than new construction.[20]

But alcohol makes this scandal all the more striking. It is well known that the French nation has been systematically intoxicated by its parliamentary majority for generally disgraceful reasons. Yet even with such knowledge in our grasp,

the determined responsibility of alcohol for crimes of blood is still astounding. One lawyer (Guillon) has estimated that it is a factor in 60 per cent of all such cases. Dr. Lagriffe sets the rate somewhere between 41.7 and 72 per cent. An investigation conducted in 1951 at the distribution center of the Fresnes prison, among inmates guilty of breaches of common law, revealed 29 per cent were chronic alcoholics and 24 per cent had alcoholic backgrounds. Finally, 95 per cent of all murderers of children have been alcoholics. These are all fine figures, but there is one we must consider which is still finer: that of the *apéritif* manufacturer who declared a profit of 410,000,000 francs in 1953. A comparison of these figures authorizes us to inform the stockholders of this company, and the assemblymen who voted for sugar beets rather than for buildings, that they have certainly killed more children than they suspect. As an adversary of capital punishment, I am far from demanding the death penalty for these individuals. But to begin with, it seems to me an indispensable and urgent duty to conduct them under military escort to the next execution of the murderer of a child, and at the conclusion of the ceremony to present them with a table of statistics which will include the figures I have been discussing.

When the state sows alcohol, it cannot be surprised if it reaps crime.[21] And it is *not* surprised, after all—it merely restricts itself to chopping off the same heads for which it poured out so much alcohol. It imperturbably executes its justice and sets itself up as a creditor: its good conscience is not affected. Hence we have one representative of the interests of alcohol indignantly answering the *Figaro* questionnaire: "I know what the most outspoken abolitionist of capital punishment would do if he were suddenly to discover assassins on the point of killing his mother, his father, his children, or his best friend . . . *Alors*!" This "*Alors*!" seems a little drunk already. Naturally the most outspoken abolitionist of capital punishment would fire, and with every justification, at the

assassins, and without affecting in the slightest his reasons for outspokenly urging the abolition of capital punishment. But if his ideas led to consequences of any value, and if the same assassins smelled a little too much of alcohol, would he not subsequently turn his attentions to those who make it their business to intoxicate our future criminals? It is even a little surprising that the parents of victims of alcoholic crime have never had the notion of requesting a few elucidations from the floor of the Assembly itself. But the contrary is the rule, and the State, armed with the confidence of all, with the full support of public opinion, continues to punish murderers, even and especially when they are alcoholics, somewhat the way a pimp punishes the hard-working creatures who provide his livelihood. But the pimp doesn't preach about his business. The State does. Its jurisprudence, if it admits that drunkenness occasionally constitutes an extenuating circumstance, is unaware of chronic alcoholism. Drunkenness, however, accompanies only crimes of violence, which are not punishable by death, whereas the chronic alcoholic is also capable of premeditated crimes, which gain him the death penalty. The State thus maintains the right to punish in the very case in which its own responsibility is profoundly involved.

Does this come down to saying that every alcoholic must be declared nonresponsible by a State which will strike its breast in horror until the entire populace drinks nothing but fruit juice? Certainly not. No more than it comes down to saying that the facts of heredity eliminate responsibility and guilt. A criminal's real responsibility cannot be determined exactly. All calculation is powerless to take into account the total number of our ancestors, alcoholic or not. At the other end of time, such a number would be 10^{22} times greater than the number of inhabitants of the earth at present. The total of diseased or morbid tendencies which could be transmitted is thus incalculable. We enter the world burdened with the weight of an infinite necessity, and according to logic must agree

on a situation of a general nonresponsibility. Logically, neither punishment nor reward can be distributed accurately, and therefore all society becomes impossible. Yet the instinct of self-preservation, in societies and individuals alike, requires, on the contrary, the postulate of individual responsibility; a responsibility that must be accepted, without daydreaming of an absolute indulgence which would coincide with the death and disappearance of any society whatsoever. But the same line of reasoning that compels us to abandon a general nonresponsibility must also lead us to conclude that there is never, on the other hand, a situation of total responsibility, and consequently no such thing as absolute punishment or absolute reward. No one can be rewarded absolutely, not even by the Nobel prize. But no one must be punished absolutely if he is found guilty, and with all the more reason if there is a chance he might be innocent. The death penalty, which neither serves as an example nor satisfies the conditions of retaliative justice, usurps in addition an exorbitant privilege by claiming the right to punish a necessarily relative guilt by an absolute and irreparable penalty.

If, in fact, the death penalty serves as a questionable example of our gimcrack justice, one must agree with its supporters that it is eliminative: capital punishment definitively eliminates the condemned man. This fact alone, actually, ought to exclude, especially for its partisans, the discussion of all the other dangerous arguments which, as we have seen, can be ceaselessly contested. It would be more honest to say that capital punishment is definitive because it must be, to point out that certain men are socially irrecoverable, constituting a permanent danger to each citizen and to the social order as a whole, so that, before anything else, they must be suppressed. No one, at least, will question the existence of certain beasts in our society, creatures of incorrigible energy and brutality that nothing seems capable of subduing. And although the death penalty certainly does not solve the problem they

present, let us at least agree that it goes a long way towards eliminating it.

I will return to these men. But first, is capital punishment confined only to them? Can we be absolutely certain that not one man of all those executed is recoverable? Can we even swear that one or another may not be *innocent*? In both cases, must we not admit that capital punishment is eliminative only to the degree that it is irreparable? Yesterday, March 15, 1957, Burton Abbott, condemned to death for the murder of a 14-year-old girl, was executed in California: it was certainly the kind of crime that I imagine would class him among the irrecoverables. Although Abbott had constantly protested his innocence, he was condemned. His execution was scheduled for March 15 at 10 in the morning. At 9:10 a reprieve was granted to allow the defense to present an appeal.[22] At 11 o'clock the appeal was rejected. At 11:15 Abbott entered the gas chamber. At 11:18 he began to breathe the first fumes of gas. At 11:20 the secretary of the reprieve board telephoned the prison: the board had changed its decision. The governor had been called first, but he had gone sailing, and they had called the prison directly. Abbott was removed from the gas chamber: it was too late. If the weather had been bad the day before, the governor of California would not have gone sailing. He would have telephoned two minutes earlier: Abbott would be alive today and would perhaps see his innocence proved. Any other punishment, even the most severe, would have permitted this chance. Capital punishment, however, permitted him none.

It may be thought that this case is exceptional. Our lives are exceptional too, and yet, in the fugitive existence we have been granted, this exception occurred not ten hours by plane from where I am writing. Abbott's misfortune is not so much an exception as it is one news item among many others, an error which is not at all isolated, if we examine our newspapers (for example, the Deshay case, to instance only the most

recent). The jurist Olivecroix, applying a calculus of probabilities to the chance of judiciary error, concluded in 1860 that approximately one innocent man was condemned out of every 257 cases. The proportion seems low, but only in relation to moderate punishment. In relation to capital punishment, the proportion is infinitely high. When Hugo wrote that he preferred to call the guillotine Lesurques,[23] he did not mean that every man who was decapitated was a Lesurques, but that one Lesurques was enough to wipe out the value of capital punishment for ever. It is understandable that Belgium definitely abjured pronouncing capital punishment after one such judiciary error, and that England brought up the question of its abolition after the Hayes case. We can readily sympathize with the conclusions of that attorney general who, consulted on the petition for reprieve of a criminal who was most probably guilty but whose victim's body had not been recovered, wrote as follows: "The survival of X assures the authorities the possibility of effectively examining at their leisure every new sign that may subsequently be discovered of the existence of his wife (the victim, whose body had not been recovered). . . . On the other hand, his execution, eliminating this hypothetical possibility of examination, would give, I fear, to the slightest evidence of her still being alive a theoretical value, a pressure of regret which I consider it inopportune to create." The man's feeling for both justice and truth are admirably expressed, and it would be advisable to cite as often as possible in our assize courts that "pressure of regret" which sums up so steadfastly the danger with which every juryman is confronted. Once the innocent man is dead, nothing more can be done for him except to re-establish his good name, if someone is still interested in asking for such a service. His innocence is restored —actually he had never lost it in the first place. But the persecution of which he has been the victim, his dreadful sufferings, and his hideous death have been acquired forever.

There is nothing left to do but consider the innocent men of the future, in order to spare them such torments. It has been done in Belgium; but in France, apparently, there are no bad consciences.

Why should our consciences be bad if they are based on our conception of justice: has not this conception made great progress, does it not follow in the footsteps of science itself? When the learned expert gives his opinion in the assize courts, it is as if a priest had spoken, and the jury, raised in the religion of science—the jury nods. Nevertheless several recent cases—particularly the Besnard affair—have given us a good idea of the comedy such expertise can provide. Guilt is not better established because it can be demonstrated in a test tube. Another test tube can prove the contrary, and the personal equation will thereby maintain all its old significance in such perilous mathematics as these. The proportion of scientists who are really experts is the same as that of judges who are really psychologists—scarcely more than that of juries that are really serious and objective. Today, as yesterday, the chance of error remains. Tomorrow another expert's report will proclaim the innocence of another Abbott. But Abbott will be dead, scientifically enough, and science, which claims to prove innocence as well as guilt, has not yet succeeded in restoring the life it has taken.

And among the guilty themselves, can we also be sure of having killed only "irrecoverables"? Those who like myself have had to attend hearings in our assize courts know that a number of elements of sheer accident enter into a sentence, even a death sentence. The looks of the accused; his background (adultery is often regarded as an incriminating circumstance by some jurors: I have never been able to believe that all are completely faithful to their wives and husbands); his attitude (which is only regarded as being in his favor if it is as conventional as possible, which usually means as near play-acting as possible); even his elocution (one must

neither stutter nor speak too well) and the incidents of the hearing sentimentally evaluated (the truth, unfortunately, is not always moving)—all these are so many accidents that influence the final decision of a jury. At the moment the verdict recommending the death penalty is pronounced, one can be sure that this most certain of punishments has only been arrived at by a great conjunction of uncertainties. When one realizes that the verdict of death depends on the jury's estimation of the extenuating circumstances, particularly since the reforms of 1832 gave our juries the power to admit *undetermined* extenuating circumstances, one can appreciate the margin left to the momentary humors of the jurors. It is no longer the law which establishes with any precision those cases in which the death penalty is recommended, but the jury which, after the event, estimates its suitability by guesswork, to say the least. As there are no two juries alike, the man who is executed might as well have been spared. Irrecoverable in the eyes of the honest citizens of Île-et-Vilaine, he might well be granted the shadow of an excuse by the good people of Var. Unfortunately, the same knife falls in both departments. And it is not concerned with such details.

The accidents of the times combine with those of geography to reinforce the general absurdity. The communist French worker who was just guillotined in Algeria for having planted a bomb, discovered before it could explode, in the cloakroom of a factory was condemned as much by his act as by the times, for in the Algerian situation at present, Arab public opinion was to be shown that the guillotine was made for French necks too, and French public opinion, outraged by terrorist activities, was to be given satisfaction at the same time. Nevertheless, the minister in charge of the execution counted many communist votes in his constituency, and if the circumstances had been slightly different, the accused would have got off lightly and perhaps one day, as his party's deputy, might have found himself drinking at the same bar as the minister. Such

thoughts are bitter and one might wish they remained fresh a little longer in the minds of our governors. These gentlemen should be aware that times and manners change; a day comes along when the criminal who was executed too quickly no longer seems quite so guilty. By then it is too late, and what can you do but repent or forget? Naturally, one forgets. But society is nonetheless affected: one unpunished crime, according to the Greeks, infects the whole city. Innocence condemned to death, or crime excessively punished, leaves a stain no less hideous in the long run. We know it, in France.

Such is the nature of human justice, it will be said, and despite its imperfections, after all, even human justice is better than the operation of despotism or chance. But this rueful preference is tolerable only in relation to moderate punishment. Confronted by death sentences, it is a scandal. A classic work on French law excuses the death penalty from being subject to degree in the following words: "Human justice has not the slightest ambition to insure proportion of this nature. Why? Because it knows itself to be imperfect." Must we therefore conclude that this imperfection authorizes us to pronounce an absolute judgment, and that society, uncertain of realizing justice in its pure state, must rush headlong with every likelihood of error, upon the supreme injustice? If human justice knows itself to be imperfect, might not that knowledge be more suitably and modestly demonstrated by leaving a sufficient margin around our condemnations for the eventual reparation of error?[24] This very weakness in which human justice finds extenuating circumstances for itself in every case and on every occasion—is it not to be accorded to the criminal himself as well? Can the jury in all decency say, "If we condemn you to death by mistake, you will surely forgive us in consideration of the weaknesses of the human nature we all share. But we nevertheless condemn you to death without the slightest consideration of these weaknesses or of this common nature"? All

men have a community in error and in aberration. Yet must this community operate in behalf of the tribunal and be denied to the accused? No, for if justice has any meaning in this world, it is none other than the recognition of this very community: it cannot, in its very essence, be separated from compassion. Let it be understood that by compassion I mean only the consciousness of a common suffering, not a frivolous indulgence that takes no account of the sufferings and rights of the victim. Compassion does not exclude punishment, but it withholds an ultimate condemnation. It is revolted by the definitive, irreparable measure that does injustice to man in general since it does not recognize his share in the misery of the common condition.

As a matter of fact, certain juries know this well enough, and often admit the extenuating circumstances of a crime which nothing can extenuate. This is because they regard the death penalty as too extreme and prefer to punish insufficiently rather than to excess. In such cases, the extreme severity of the punishment tends to sanction crime instead of penalizing it. There is scarcely one session of the assize courts of which one cannot read in our press that a verdict is incoherent, that in the face of the facts it appears either insufficient or excessive. The jurors are not unaware of this. They simply prefer, as we should do ourselves, when confronted with the enormity of capital punishment, to appear confused, rather than compromise their sleep for nights to come. Knowing themselves imperfect, at least they draw the appropriate consequences. And true justice is on their side, precisely to the degree that logic is not.

There are, however, great criminals that every jury will condemn, no matter where and when they are tried. Their crimes are certain, and the proofs elicited by the prosecution correspond with the admissions of the defense. What is abnormal and even monstrous in their crimes unquestionably determines their category as pathological, though in the ma-

jority of such cases psychiatrists affirm the criminal's responsibility. Recently, in Paris, a young man of rather weak character, but known for the sweetness and affection of his nature and his extreme devotion to his family, described himself as being annoyed by his father's remarks on the lateness of the hours he had been keeping. The father was reading at the dining-room table. The young man took an axe and struck his father several mortal blows with it from behind. Then, in the same fashion, he struck down his mother, who was in the kitchen. He removed his bloody trousers and hid them in the closet, changed his clothes, and after paying a visit to the family of his fiancée without revealing the slightest discomposure, returned to his own house and informed the police his parents had been murdered. The police immediately discovered the bloody trousers, and easily obtained the parricide's unperturbed confession. The psychiatrists agreed on his responsibility for these "murders by irritation." The young man's strange indifference, of which he gave other indications in prison (rejoicing that his parents' funeral had been so well attended: "Everyone liked them," he said to his lawyers), can nevertheless scarcely be considered as normal. But his reason was apparently intact.

Many "monsters" offer a countenance just as impenetrable. They are therefore eliminated upon consideration of the facts alone. Because of the nature or the degree of their crimes it is inconceivable that they would repent or even wish to change their ways. In their case, a recurrence is what must be avoided, and there is no other solution than to eliminate them. On this—and only this—aspect of the question is the discussion of the death penalty legitimate. In all other cases the arguments of its partisans cannot withstand the criticism of its opponents. At this point, in fact, at our present level of ignorance, a kind of wager is established: no expertise, no exercise of reason can give the deciding vote between those who think a last chance must always be granted to even the

last of men and those who consider this chance as entirely illusory. But it is perhaps possible, at this very point, to override the *eternal* opposition between the partisans and opponents of the death penalty, by determining the advisability of such a penalty *at this time, and in Europe*. With considerably less competence, I shall attempt to parallel the efforts of professor Jean Graven, a Swiss jurist who writes, in his remarkable study of the problems of capital punishment: ". . . Regarding the problem that once again confronts our conscience and our reason, it is our opinion that the solution must be based not upon the conceptions, the problems, and the arguments of the past, nor on the theoretical hopes and promises of the future, but on the ideas, the given circumstances, and the necessities of today."[25] One could, in fact, argue forever about the advantages or devastations of the death penalty as it has been through the ages or as it might be contemplated in some eternity of ideas. But the death penalty plays its part here and now, and we must determine here and now where we stand in relation to a contemporary executioner. What does the death penalty mean for us, halfway through the twentieth century?

For the sake of simplification, let us say that our civilization has lost the only values that, to a certain degree, could justify the death penalty, and that it suffers, on the contrary, from every evil that necessitates its suppression. In other words, the abolition of the death penalty should be demanded by the conscious members of our society on grounds of both logic and fidelity to the facts.

Of logic, first of all. To decide that a man must be definitively punished is to deny him any further opportunity whatsoever to make reparation for his acts. It is at this juncture, we repeat, that the arguments for and against capital punishment confront one another blindly, eventuating in a fruitless checkmate. Yet it is exactly here that none of us can

afford to be positive, for we are all judges, all party to the dispute. Hence our uncertainty about our right to kill and our impotence to convince others on either side. Unless there is absolute innocence, there can be no supreme judge. Now we have all committed some transgression in our lives, even if this transgression has not put us within the power of the law and has remained an unknown crime: there are no just men, only hearts more or less poor in justice. The mere fact of living permits us to know this, and to add to the sum of our actions a little of the good that might partially compensate for the evil we have brought into the world. This right to live that coincides with the opportunity for reparation is the natural right of every man, even the worst. The most abandoned criminal and the worthiest judge here find themselves side by side, equally miserable and jointly responsible. Without this right, the moral life is strictly impossible. None among us, in particular, is entitled to despair of a single man, unless it be after his death, which transforms his life into destiny and admits of a final judgment. But to pronounce this final judgment before death, to decree the closing of accounts when the creditor is still alive, is the privilege of no man. On these grounds, at least, he who judges absolutely condemns himself absolutely.

Barnard Fallot of the Masuy gang, who worked for the Gestapo, confessed to the entire list of terrible crimes of which he was accused, and later went to his death with great courage, declaring himself beyond hope of reprieve: "My hands are too red with blood," he said to one of his fellow prisoners.[26] Public opinion and that of his judges certainly classified him among the irrecoverables, and I would have been tempted to put him in that category myself, had I not read one astonishing piece of evidence: after having declared that he wanted to die bravely, Fallot told the same prisoner: "Do you know what I regret most of all? Not having known sooner about the Bible they gave me here. If I had, I wouldn't

be where I am now." It is not a question of surrendering to the sentimentality of conventional imagery and conjuring up Victor Hugo's good convicts. The age of enlightenment, as it is called, wished to abolish the death penalty under the pretext that man was fundamentally good. We know, of course, that he is not (he is simply better or worse). After the last twenty years of our splendid history we know it very well. But it is because man is not fundamentally good that no one among us can set himself up as an absolute judge, for no one among us can pretend to absolute innocence. The verdict of capital punishment destroys the only indisputable human community there is, the community in the face of death, and such a judgment can only be legitimated by a truth or a principle that takes its place above all men, beyond the human condition.

Capital punishment, in fact, throughout history has always been a religious punishment. When imposed in the name of the king, representative of God on earth, or by priests, or in the name of a society considered as a sacred body, it is not the human community that is destroyed but the functioning of the guilty man as a member of the divine community which alone can give him his life. Such a man is certainly deprived of his earthly life, yet his opportunity for reparation is preserved. The real judgment is not pronounced in this world, but in the next. Religious values, especially the belief in an eternal life, are thus the only ones on which the death penalty can be based, since according to their own logic they prevent that penalty from being final and irreparable: it is justified only insofar as it is not supreme.

The Catholic Church, for example, has always admitted the necessity of the death penalty. It has imposed the penalty itself, without avarice, at other periods. Today, its doctrines still justify capital punishment, and concede the State the right to apply it. No matter how subtle this doctrine may be, there is at its core a profound feeling which was directly ex-

pressed by a Swiss councilor from Fribourg during a discussion of capital punishment by the national council in 1937; according to M. Grand, even the worst criminal examines his own conscience when faced with the actuality of execution. "He repents, and his preparation for death is made easier. The Church has saved one of its members, has accomplished its divine mission. This is why the Church has steadfastly countenanced capital punishment, not only as a means of legitimate protection, but *as a powerful means of salvation.* . . . [My italics.] Without becoming precisely a matter of doctrine, the death penalty, like war itself, can be justified by its quasi-divine efficacity."

By virtue of the same reasoning, no doubt, one can read on the executioner's sword in Fribourg the motto "Lord Jesus, thou art the Judge." The executioner is thereby invested with a divine function. He is the man who destroys the body in order to deliver the soul to its divine judgment, which no man on earth can foresee. It will perhaps be considered that such mottos imply rather outrageous confusions, and certainly those who confine themselves to the actual teachings of Jesus will see this handsome sword as yet another outrage to the body of Christ. In this light can be understood the terrible words of a Russian prisoner whom the executioners of the Tsar were about to hang in 1905, when he turned to the priest who was about to console him with the image of Christ and said: "Stand back, lest you commit a sacrilege." An unbeliever will not fail to remark that those who have placed in the very center of their faith the overwhelming victim of a judicial error should appear more reticent, to say the least, when confronted by cases of legal murder. One might also remind the believer that the emperor Julian, before his conversion, refused to give official posts to Christians because they systematically refused to pronounce the death sentence or to aid in administering it. For five centuries Christians believed that the strict moral teaching of their master forbade

them to kill. But the Catholic faith is derived not only from the teachings of Christ, it is nourished by the Old Testament, by Saint Paul, and by the Fathers as well. In particular the immortality of the soul and the universal resurrection of the body are articles of dogma. Hence, capital punishment, for the believer, can be regarded as a provisional punishment which does not in the least affect the definite sentence, but remains a disposition necessary to the terrestrial order, an administrative measure which, far from making an end of the guilty man, can promote, on the contrary, his redemption in heaven. I do not say that all believers follow this reasoning, and I can imagine without much difficulty that most Catholics stand closer to Christ than to Moses or Saint Paul. I say only that the belief in the immortality of the soul has permitted Catholicism to formulate the problem of capital punishment in very different terms, and to justify it.

But what does such a justification mean to the society we live in, a society which in its institutions and manners alike has become almost entirely secular? When an atheist—or skeptic—or agnostic judge imposes the death penalty on an unbelieving criminal, he is pronouncing a definitive punishment that cannot be revised. He sits upon God's throne,[27] but without possessing God's powers and, moreover, without believing in them. He condemns to death, in fact, because his ancestors believed in eternal punishment. Yet the society which he claims to represent pronounces, in reality, a purely eliminative measure, destroys the human community united against death, and sets itself up as an absolute value because it pretends to absolute power. Of course society traditionally assigns a priest to the condemned man, and the priest may legitimately hope that fear of punishment will help effect the condemned man's conversion. Yet who will accept this casuistry as the justification of a punishment so often inflicted and so often received in an entirely different spirit? It is one thing to believe and 'therefore know not fear,' and another to find

one's faith through fear. Conversion by fire or the knife will always be suspect, and one can well understand why the Church renounced a triumph by terror over infidel hearts. In any case, a secularized society has nothing to gain from a conversion concerning which it professes complete disinterest: it enacts a consecrated punishment, and at the same time deprives that punishment of its justification and its utility alike. Delirious in its own behalf, society plucks the wicked from its bosom as if it were virtue personified. In the same way, an honorable man might kill his son who had strayed from the path of duty, saying, "Really, I didn't know what else I could do!" Society thus usurps the right of selection, as if it were nature, and adds a terrible suffering to the eliminative process, as if it were a redeeming god.

To assert, in any case, that a man must be absolutely cut off from society because he is absolutely wicked is the same as saying that society is absolutely good, which no sensible person will believe today. It will not be believed—in fact, it is easier to believe the contrary. Our society has become as diseased and criminal as it is only because it has set itself up as its own final justification, and has had no concern but its own preservation and success in history. Certainly it is a secularized society, yet during the nineteenth century it began to fashion a kind of ersatz religion by proposing itself as an object of adoration. The doctrines of evolution, and the theories of selection that accompanied such doctrines, have proposed the future of society as its final end. The political utopias grafted onto these doctrines have proposed, at the end of time, a Golden Age that justifies in advance all intermediary enterprises. Society has grown accustomed to legalizing whatever can minister to its future, and consequently to usurping the supreme punishment in an absolute fashion: it has regarded as a crime and a sacrilege everything that contradicts its own intentions and temporal dogmas. In other words, the executioner, formerly a priest, has become a civil

servant. The results surround us. Half-way through the century, our society, which has forfeited the logical right to pronounce the death penalty, must now abolish it for reasons of realism.

Confronted with crime, how does our civilization in fact define itself? The answer is easy: for 30 years crimes of state have vastly exceeded crimes of individuals. I shall not even mention wars—general or local—although blood is a kind of alcohol that eventually intoxicates like the strongest wine. I am referring here to the number of individuals killed directly by the State, a number that has grown to astronomic proportions and infinitely exceeds that of "private" murders. There are fewer and fewer men condemned by common law, and more and more men executed for political reasons. The proof of this fact is that each of us, no matter how honorable he is, can now envisage the *possibility* of someday being put to death, whereas such an eventuality at the beginning of the century would have appeared farcical at best. Alphonse Karr's famous remark, "Let my lords the assassins begin," no longer has any meaning: those who spill the most blood are also those who believe they have right, logic, and history on their side.

It is not so much against the individual killer that our society must protect itself then, as against the State. Perhaps this equation will be reversed in another thirty years. But for the present, a legitimate defense must be made against the State, before all else. Justice and the most realistic sense of our time require that the law protect the individual against a State given over to the follies of sectarianism and pride. "Let the State begin by abolishing the death penalty" must be our rallying cry today.

Bloody laws, it has been said, make bloody deeds. But it is also possible for a society to suffer that state of ignominy in which public behavior, no matter how disorderly, comes no where near being so bloody as the laws. Half of Europe

knows this state. We have known it in France and we risk knowing it again. The executed of the Occupation produced the executed of the Liberation whose friends still dream of revenge. Elsewhere, governments charged with too many crimes are preparing to drown their guilt in still greater massacres. We kill for a nation or for a deified social class. We kill for a future society, likewise deified. He who believes in omniscience can conceive of omnipotence. Temporal idols that demand absolute faith tirelessly mete out absolute punishments. And religions without transcendance murder those they condemn en masse and without hope.

How can European society in the twentieth century survive if it does not defend the individual by every means within its power against the oppression of the State? To forbid putting a man to death is one means of publicly proclaiming that society and the State are not absolute values, one means of demonstrating that nothing authorizes them to legislate definitively, to bring to pass the irreparable. Without the death penalty, Gabriel Péri and Brasillach would perhaps be among us still; we could then judge them, according to our lights, and proudly speak out our judgment, instead of which they now judge us, and it is we who must remain silent. Without the death penalty, the corpse of Rajk would not still be poisoning Hungary, a less guilty Germany would be received with better grace by the nations of Europe, the Russian Revolution would not still be writhing in its shame, and the blood of Algeria would weigh less heavily upon us here in France. Without the death penalty, Europe itself would not be infected by the corpses accumulated in its exhausted earth for the last twenty years. Upon our continent all values have been overturned by fear and hatred among individuals as among nations. The war of ideas is waged by rope and knife. It is no longer the natural human society that exercises its rights of repression, but a ruling ideology that demands its human sacrifices. "The lesson the scaffold always provides," Francart

wrote, "is that human life ceases to be sacred when it is considered useful to suppress it." Apparently it has been considered increasingly useful, the lesson has found apt pupils, and the contagion is spreading everywhere. And with it, the disorders of nihilism. A spectacular counter-blow is required: it must be proclaimed, in institutions and as a matter of principle, that the human person is above and beyond the State. Every measure which will diminish the pressure of social forces on the individual will also aid in the decongestion of a Europe suffering from an afflux of blood, will permit us to think more clearly, and to make our way toward recovery. The disease of Europe is to believe in nothing and to claim to know everything. But Europe does not know everything, far from it, and to judge by the rebellion and the hope in which we find ourselves today, Europe does believe in something: Europe believes that the supreme misery of man, at its mysterious limit, borders on his supreme greatness. For the majority of Europeans faith is lost, and with it the justifications faith conferred upon the order of punishment. But the majority of Europeans are also sickened by that idolatry of the State which has claimed to replace their lost faith. From now on, with divided goals, certain and uncertain, determined never to submit and never to oppress, we must recognize both our hope and our ignorance, renounce all absolute law, all irreparable institutions. We know enough to be able to say that this or that great criminal deserves a sentence of perpetual forced labor. But we do not know enough to say that he can be deprived of his own future, which is to say, of our common opportunity for reparation. In tomorrow's united Europe, on whose behalf I write, the solemn abolition of the death penalty must be the first article of that European Code for which we all hope.

From the humanitarian idylls of the eighteenth century to its bloody scaffolds the road runs straight and is easily fol-

lowed; we all know today's executioners are humanists. And therefore we cannot be too suspicious of humanitarian ideologies applied to a problem like that of capital punishment. I should like to repeat, by way of conclusion, that my opposition to the death penalty derives from no illusions as to the natural goodness of the human creature, and from no faith in a golden age to come. On the contrary, the abolition of capital punishment seems necessary to me for reasons of qualified pessimism, reasons I have attempted to explain in terms of logic and the most realistic considerations. Not that the heart has not made its contribution to what I have been saying: for anyone who has spent several weeks among these texts, these memories, and these men—all, intimately or remotely, connected with the scaffold—there can be no question of leaving their dreadful ranks unaffected by what one has seen and heard. Nevertheless, I do not believe there is no responsibility in this world for what I have found, or that one should submit to our modern propensity for absolving victim and killer in the same moral confusion. This purely sentimental confusion involves more cowardice than generosity, and ends up by justifying whatever is worst in this world: if everything is blessed, then slave camps are blessed, and organized murder, and the cynicism of the great political bosses—and ultimately, blessing everything alike, one betrays one's own brothers. We can see this happening all around us. But indeed, with the world in its present condition the man of the twentieth century asks for laws and institutions of *convalescence* that will check without crushing, lead without hampering. Hurled into the unregulated dynamism of history, man needs a new physics, new laws of equilibrium. He needs, most of all, a reasonable society, not the anarchy into which his own pride and the State's inordinate powers have plunged him.

It is my conviction that the abolition of the death penalty will help us advance toward that society. In taking this initia-

tive, France could propose its extension on either side of the iron curtain; in any case she could set an example. Capital punishment would be replaced by a sentence of perpetual forced labor for criminals judged incorrigible, and by shorter terms for others. As for those who believe that such punishment is still more cruel than capital punishment itself, I wonder why, in that case, they do not reserve it for Landru and his like and relegate capital punishment to secondary offenders. One might also add that such forced labor leaves the condemned man the possibility of choosing his death, whereas the guillotine is a point of no return. On the other hand, I would answer those who believe that a sentence of perpetual forced labor is too mild a punishment by remarking first on their lack of imagination and then by pointing out that the privation of liberty could seem to them a mild punishment only to the degree that contemporary society has taught them to despise what liberty they have.[28]

That Cain was not killed, but bore in the sight of all men a mark of reprobation is, in any case, the lesson we should draw from the Old Testament, not to mention the Gospels, rather than taking our inspiration from the cruel examples of the Mosaic law. There is no reason why at least a limited version of such an experiment should not be attempted in France (say for a ten-year period), if our government is still capable of redeeming its vote for alcohol by the great measure in behalf of civilization which total abolition would represent. And if public opinion and its representatives cannot renounce our slothful law which confines itself to eliminating what it cannot amend, at least, while waiting for a day of regeneration and of truth, let us not preserve as it is this "solemn shambles" (in Tarde's expression) which continues to disgrace our society. The death penalty, as it is imposed, even as rarely as it is imposed, is a disgusting butchery, an outrage inflicted on the spirit and body of man. This truncation, this living severed head, these long gouts of blood, belong to a barbarous epoch

that believed it could subdue the people by offering them degrading spectacles. Today, when this ignoble death is secretly administered, what meaning can such torture have? The truth is that in an atomic age we kill as we did in the age of steelyards: where is the man of normal sensibility whose stomach is not turned at the mere idea of such clumsy surgery? If the French state is incapable of overcoming its worst impulses to this degree, and of furnishing Europe with one of the remedies it needs most, let it at least reform its means of administering capital punishment. Science, which has taught us so much about killing, could at least teach us to kill decently. An anesthetic which would permit the accused to pass from a state of sleep to death, which would remain within his reach for at least a day so that he could make free use of it, and which in cases of refusal or failure of nerve could then be administered to him, would assure the elimination of the criminal, if that is what we require, but would also provide a little decency where today there is nothing but a sordid and obscene exhibition.

I indicate these compromises only to the degree that one must sometimes despair of seeing wisdom and the principles of civilization impose themselves upon those responsible for our future. For certain men, more numerous than is supposed, knowing what the death penalty really is and being unable to prevent its application is physically insupportable. In their own way, they suffer this penalty too, and without any justification. If we at least lighten the weight of the hideous images that burden these men, society will lose nothing by our actions. But ultimately even such measures will be insufficient. Neither in the hearts of men nor in the manners of society will there be a lasting peace until we outlaw death.

—Translated by Richard Howard

Notes:

1. A description of the actual procedure in French prisons. Cf. the movie *We Are All Murderers.*—Translator.
2. According to the optimistic Dr. Guillotine, the condemned man would feel nothing at all—at most a "slight coolness at the back of his neck."
3. *Justice sans bourreau,* No. 2, June, 1956.
4. Published by Roger Grenier, in *Les Monstres,* Gallimard.
5. Editions Matot-Braine, Reims.
6. In 1905, in Loiret.
7. The magazine *Réalités,* No. 105, October, 1954.
8. One can read week after week in our press about criminals who wavered between killing others and killing themselves.
9. *Vide* the report of the English Select Committee of 1930 and of the Royal commission which has continued this study recently: "All the figures that we have examined confirm our statement that the abolition of the death penalty has provoked no increase in the number of crimes committed."
10. Report of the Select Committee, 1930.
11. Bela Just, *La Potence et la croix,* Fasquelle.
12. Roger Grenier, *op. cit.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Several years ago I urged the reprieve of six Tunisians who had been condemned to death for the murder of three French policemen in a riot: the circumstances during which the killing had occurred made responsibility difficult to determine. A note from the office of the President of the Republic informed me that my petition was being considered by the appropriate authorities. Unfortunately, by the time this note was in the mail I had already read that the sentence had been carried out two weeks before. Three of the condemned men had been put to death, the other three reprieved. The reasons for reprieving the latter rather than those who were executed had not been decisive. I conclude that because there were three victims there had to be three death penalties.
15. Roemen, condemned to death at the time of the Liberation, remained in chains 700 days before being executed: a scandal. Those condemned by common law wait, as a general rule, three to six month until the morning of their death. Yet if one wishes to preserve their chances of reprieve, it is not advisable to shorten the delay. I can bear witness, moreover, that the examination leading to a recommendation of mercy is conducted in France with a gravity that does not exclude an evident willingness to reprieve to the full extent that law and public opinion will allow.

16. Since there are no executions on Sunday, Saturday night is always a good night in death row.
17. Bela Just, *op. cit.*
18. A great surgeon, himself a Catholic, told me that he had learned never to tell his patients, even when they were believers, that they were suffering from an incurable cancer. The shock, he believed, was too dangerous, and even risked jeopardizing their faith.
19. Devoyod, *op. cit.* It is impossible to read objectively the petitions for reprieve presented by fathers and mothers who evidently cannot comprehend the punishment that has suddenly fallen upon them.
20. France ranks ahead of all other nations in consumption of alcohol, fifteenth in construction.
21. At the end of the last century, the partisans of capital punishment made much of an increase in the incidence of crime after 1880, which seemed to parallel a diminution in the application of the death penalty. It was in 1880, however, that the law permitting retail liquor establishments to set up shop without previous authorization was promulgated. Such facts are not difficult to interpret!
22. It should be pointed out that it is the custom in American prisons to conduct the condemned man to a new cell on the eve of his execution, thus informing him of the ceremony that awaits him.
23. The name of an innocent man guillotined in the *Courrier de Lyon* case.
24. Satisfaction was expressed over the recent reprieve of Sillon, who killed his four-year-old daughter in order to keep her from her mother, who had asked for a divorce. During his detention it was discovered that Sillon was suffering from a brain tumor that could account for the insanity of his action.
25. *Revue de Criminologie et de Police technique*, Geneva, special number, 1952.
26. Jean Bobognano, *Quartier des fauves, prison de Fresnes*, Édition du Fuseau.
27. The decision of the jury is preceded by the formula "before God and my conscience. . . ."
28. See also the report on the death penalty made by Representative Dupont to the National Assembly on May 31, 1791: "He [*the assassin*] is consumed by a bitter, burning temper; what he fears above all is repose, a state that leaves him to himself, and to escape it he continually faces death and seeks to inflict it; solitude and his conscience are his real tortures. Does this not tell us what kind of punishment we should impose, to what agonies he is most sensitive? *Is it not in the very nature of the disease that we must seek the remedy which can cure it?*" I italicize this last sentence, which makes this little-known Representative a real precursor of our modern psychological theories.

The High Bridge above the Tagus River at Toledo

A young man, alone, on the high bridge over the Tagus which
was too narrow to allow the sheep driven by the lean,
enormous dogs whose hind legs worked slowly on cogs
to pass easily . . .
(he didn't speak the language)

Pressed against the parapet either side by the crowding sheep,
the relentless pressure of the dogs communicated
itself to him also
above the waters in the gorge below.

They were hounds to him rather than sheep dogs because of
their size and savage appearance, dog tired from the
day's work.
The stiff jerking movement of the hind legs, the hanging heads
at the shepard's heels, slowly followed the excited and
crowding sheep.

The whole flock, the shepard and the dogs, were covered with
dust as if they had been all day on the road. The pace
of the sheep, slow in the mass,
governed the man and the dogs. They were approaching the
city at nightfall, the long journey completed.

In old age they walk in the old man's dreams and will still
walk in his dreams, peacefully continuing in his verse
forever.

SAPPHO

That man is peer of the gods, who
face to face sits listening
to your sweet speech and lovely
laughter.

It is this that rouses a tumult
in my breast. At mere sight of you
my voice falters, my tongue
is broken.

Straightway, a delicate fire runs in
my limbs; my eyes
are blinded and my ears
thunder.

Sweat pours out: a trembling hunts
me down. I grow
paler than grass and lack little
of dying.

View of a Woman at Her Bath

It's a satisfaction
a joy
to have one of them
in the house

When she takes a bath
she unclothes
herself. The sun
is brighter

glad of a fellow to
marvel at
the birds and flowers
look in

Why I Am Not a Painter

I am not a painter, I am a poet.
Why? I think I would rather be
a painter, but I am not. Well,

For instance, Mike Goldberg
is starting a painting. I drop in.
"Sit down and have a drink" he
says. I drink; we drink. I look
up. "You have SARDINES in it."
"Yes, it needed something there."
"Oh." I go and the days go by
and I drop in again. The painting
is going on, and I go, and the days
go by. I drop in. The painting is
finished. "Where's SARDINES?"
All that's left is just
letters, "It was too much," Mike says.

But me? One day I am thinking of
a color: orange. I write a line
about orange. Pretty soon it is a
whole page of words, not lines.
Then another page. There should be
so much more, not of orange, of
words, of how terrible orange is
and life. Days go by. It is even in
prose, I am a real poet. My poem
is finished and I haven't mentioned
orange yet. It's twelve poems, I call
it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery
I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES.

A Step Away from Them

It's my lunch hour, so I go
for a walk among the hum-colored
cabs. First, down the sidewalk
where laborers feed their dirty
glistening torsos sandwiches
and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
on. They protect them from falling
bricks, I guess. Then onto the
avenue where skirts are flipping
above heels and blow up over
grates. The sun is hot, but the
cabs stir up the air. I look
at bargains in wristwatches. There
are cats playing in sawdust.

On
to Times Square, where the sign
blows smoke over my head, and higher
the waterfall pours lightly. A
Negro stands in a doorway with a
toothpick, languorously agitating.
A blonde chorus girl clicks: he
smiles and rubs his chin. Everything
suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of
a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a
great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would
write, as are light bulbs in daylight.
I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S
CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of
Federico Fellini, *è bell' attrice.*
And chocolate malted. A lady in
foxes on such a day puts her poodle
in a cab.

There are several Puerto
Ricans on the avenue today, which
makes it beautiful and warm. First
Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?
And one has eaten and one walks,
past the magazines with nudes
and the posters for BULLFIGHT and
the Manhattan Storage Warehouse,
which they'll soon tear down. I
used to think they had the Armory
Show there.
A glass of papaya juice
and back to work. My heart is in my
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.

On Rachmaninoff's Birthday

Quick! a last poem before I go
off my rocker. Oh Rachmaninoff!
Onset, Massachusetts. Is it the fig-newton
playing the horn? Thundering windows
of hell, will your tubes ever break
into powder? Oh my palace of oranges,
junk shop, staples, umber, basalt;
I'm a child again when I was really
miserable, a pizzicato grope. My pocket
of rhinestones, Yo-yo, carpenter's pencil,
amethyst, hypo, campaign button,
is the room full of smoke? Shit
on the soup, let it burn. So it's back.
You'll never be mentally sober.

There was nothing in the house that Lilly could call her own. Ever since they had come East it had been that way. She had been unable to make so much as a fingerprint anywhere, and all the traces of her existence—a faint ring in the bathtub, powder spilled along the floor—were wiped away by the servants as soon as she left the room. Even her own clothes, leaning against each other in her closet, did not hold the shape of her, in no way seemed to stand for her. They were, like everything else now, his. She had become a little anxious lately, looking about her for a sign to tell that she still lived there.

"I should be home about six," Edward was saying, snapping shut his briefcase, "but I shall have to be at my desk until dinnertime. So will you see to it that a decent bottle of wine is chilled. Nothing too unusual, I should think." He was putting on his hat, the leather band sticking to his forehead in the heat, now his coat, his arms plunging into their sleeves. Lilly tried to listen, alarmed at how much like a fox he always looked in his hat. "I've asked the Julian Brills for eight o'clock, I think Julian could be helpful in Washington. So don't forget to tell Marie. And Lilly," he was smiling at her under his mustache, "do try and get at your checkbook today." The sun glinted on his teeth as he turned, and her "All right, Edward" was demolished in the crash of the wrought-iron door. After his steps rapping out under the archway had ended, the house was quiet.

Lilly stood like a little girl left alone. She was a woman of fifty lost in flesh which hung as heavily on her, when she moved, as an enormous snowsuit. She knew how unhealthy it was. Statistics about strained hearts and brief lifespans always made her tremble with the urgency of cutting down, and starting way back somewhere with primordial bone and muscle. And she saw how ugly it was, hating her fat with a

fury that often made her want to take a knife to it. She was aware, for example, that she looked each morning, standing in the marble hall, like a scrubwoman rigged out in the negligee of the lady of the house, monstrous in her peach chiffon. But she couldn't stop eating to save her soul.

It always surprised her to find her old self again, as she did now, in the early sunlight which glowed through the leaves and petals in the flower room. She was so much better already. This time, after Edward had left, it had taken only a few moments, and a short walk down the hall away from the front door. Here, among the curly vines and birds in their lacy cages, she almost felt at home. She almost lost a hundred pounds and had her hair redone. And although she knew it was silly, she could find her voice again when talking to the birds.

"You won't believe this," she told a small green parrot, "but I used to be beautiful when I was young. Even Edward thought so. And I was a dancer, too. When I was living in Wichita I studied all the ballets. *Sleeping Beauty,* and *Scheherazade,* I can remember them all so well. The music would take me up in its arms and I would move with it, as though I were going through a great palace where I could go in all the rooms. I could be everything it told me. It was the most marvelous thing!" She gave the parrot a little smile, he turning his head way low and around to peer at her. In the flower room all the life was so real: the standing stems, the gesturing flowers and the small thud of birds hopping in their private way from perch to perch. It is a nice room, Lilly thought, to find yourself in, with all your friends around you. "You sweetheart, you're such a plucky little red flower," she whispered to the first one of summer on a rose-geranium plant. "And you have very warm feet," she said to the elderly canary who could still get out of his cage and sit on her finger. "And you, you are greedy and disgusting," she told a huge rubber plant in the corner which had the habit of leaning way out

across the window and hogging all the sunlight. "I will have to chop you down, someday."

But now I must go and tell John about the wine, she remembered. And do all the other things which I can't seem to think of now, but I will think of them in time.

Telling John things Edward had told her to tell him frightened Lilly, so she always did it first. John had been the butler for twelve years, and during that time all the towers of plates and rows of goblets in the pantry had become his. He dealt them out for dinner parties, selecting carefully for each occasion, and flanked them with silver from the dark chests, laying them on a lace or linen cloth. When everyone had left the table he gathered them back, washed and dried them knowingly, and returned them to their proper places. In the beginning Lilly used to say, Let's have the flowered plates with gold edges, or, I love the ones with midnight blue around them, John. But John would draw himself up into such a monument of horror, looking down at her with bulging eyes, that Lilly would apologize, and retreat from his domain.

She gathered her peach collar up around her throat, and moved uncertainly through the black and white hallway, through the Louis Quinze living room, across the Turkish rug in the dining room, coming to a halt behind the screen in front of the pantry door.

"You know," she told a lady in blue who was sitting on a bench on the screen, "when I was a little girl the circus only came to town once a year. We would all go down to the railroad tracks to watch them unload the animals. I always liked the camel best." Then she pushed open the door.

John was drying the breakfast dishes, his hands pink from the hot water, his dignity calm in rolled-up sleeves and an apron. Lilly noticed a chocolate mole on his forearm, hairy and big as a quarter, which she had never seen before, but he didn't try to cover it up. She couldn't imagine him ever being embarrassed, or laughing, or spilling coffee on his shirt

and getting angry at himself. She raised her head to look at him squarely, which was the way to give orders to servants, and her heart sank at his patient expression.

"Mr. Hillman asked me to tell you," she began, while his ripe-olive eyes opened wider and wider, "that he would like a bottle of wine chilled for dinner." She wished she could stop her own eyes from widening in response to his, but it always happened. "Nothing too unusual, he thinks." They seemed to balloon out of her head, and her mouth felt dry. "Please," she added, lost now in his diluent stare. His towel began to circle around his plate as he said, with great resonance, "Yes indeed, madame." He blinked, and turned again to his dishwater.

"Thank you, John." Lilly backed out of the heavy door. When she let it go, it sucked itself back into its eternal alignment with the pantry walls.

"Dear me," she said to herself, "he ought to have that mole removed. Moles can get out of hand, and be dangerous. And I still say, he does have the worst habit with his eyes, even though Edward doesn't see it. Sort of queer, I think. I wonder if he used to be a hypnotist. I wonder if he does it to everybody, or if it's just me. Probably just me, since almost everyone seems to scare me these days, even Edward. I just can't seem to talk to anyone, any more, without wanting to run for my life. It's because I am so fat, like a giant mushroom, and I repel everybody. I can feel them being repelled, and I don't blame them a bit. Not a bit. I will tell Marie to give me only celery for lunch, just two stalks, and a cup of consommé, and perhaps one of her almond cookies for dessert." Her short, peach form trudged back through the dining room, traveling across a Turkish wilderness woven, a hundred years ago, by dark untrustworthy hands in a place where she had never been.

Her breath came faster as she started up the stairs, and tiny beads of sweat formed across her upper lip. She was thinking now of the moment when, back in her own room, she

would press the ivory button at her bedside and in some labyrinthian miraculous way her signal would ring near Marie, in the kitchen.

"Marie will hear me," she said, settling back onto her bed and crossing her ankles prettily. She still had pretty ankles. "She'll come up to me, and we'll have one of our long discussions." Lilly smiled at her door around which Marie would appear earnestly, unfailingly, to talk about food. Her steps were coming now.

"O Marie, here you are at last!"

"Ah yes, madame. It is not so easy for me to climb the stairs on a day like this. I am no longer so young, and in such a hot weather, I assure you, it is only for madame I make the effort."

"I know, Marie, I know," said Lilly, filled with sympathy and with the breath of delight that always came with it. Once she had said to Edward, "Marie and I understand each other perfectly. It's really quite remarkable, the understanding we have." And Edward had replied, "Why, not at all. It's very simple. Marie knows an easy job when she sees one, that's what she understands about you. And you, you find you have a deep feeling for a cook. It's not at all surprising, really." Lilly had been hurt, and had even cried a little as she used to in the old days when he teased her like that. But somehow her bond with Marie had survived, secretly since she never mentioned it to Edward again, until it had become the happiest factor in her life. Out of the blur of unapproachable faces, Marie's would appear by her bedside, a round reassuring expanse with nothing in it to fear. The mouth could never say polite things which were untrue, and the eyebrows were silky and serene. It was the kind of face, Lilly felt, that she would like to have at her deathbed. Often she had wanted to ask, "Marie, what do you really think of me? Am I really hopeless?" certain that Marie's answer would be the most valuable of all.

"Madame must be careful not to catch cold on such a hot day," she was saying now in her brassy voice. "My kitchen, I tell you right now, it is no place for cooking. It is a big steam in there, like the breath of a mad dog, I give you my word." Her blue eyes were fierce at the outrage of it.

"I know, Marie," Lilly smiled, "it's perfectly dreadful. I will ask Mr. Hillman again about getting you an air-conditioner, but I've asked him twice already, and he hasn't remembered." She stopped, caught by a dire and self-pitying dread which had crossed her mind before. "Why does he always forget the few things I think would be nice?" she asked, not daring to look up. "Sometimes, Marie, I hate to say this, but sometimes I think he does it on purpose, just to hurt me. Then I feel that he really hates me, and wishes that I would go out of his life, somehow."

"Ah, no, it is not so serious as this. Surely monsieur would not do this terrible thing, no. He is not a cruel man, madame, and you must not think these sinful thoughts. Besides, monsieur is a person of importance, who is in the business of making many big decisions. We must not worry too much with air-conditioning such a man as this."

"But Marie, he won't remember. I just know he won't, and how will you breathe, this summer?"

"Then, madame, you have only to tell him a third time. Men always remember the third time, they are famous for this."

Lilly could have wept. It was so much more to her now than just a question of telling him a third time. She had had, she knew, a momentous last hope that Marie would say, "Ah madame, monsieur is indeed very thoughtless, not only of me and whether I cannot breathe in my kitchen, but also of you, my poor friend, and whether you cannot breathe any more." But Marie had only told her what a criminal she had been to expect so much. She had made a kindly rummage through the

evidence of Edward's days: four telephones, big decisions, the sense of unimpeachable importance—and a judgment in his favor. Of course she was right. Edward was not really cruel. And why should he remember her now anyway, when there was no longer anything about her worth remembering?

Marie took her pencil from the historical black structure of hair on top of her head and her notebook from her apron pocket. Turning the pages carefully to today, she prepared to record what they would eat.

"Just now," she declared, "I have fâllen in love with a fish. Please don't laugh at me, madame (Lilly had almost laughed, or almost cried, not knowing which). It has never happened to me before. I see him in the fishman's window on my way home from mass, and right away I say: God has put you here for Marie. He is a salmon, gorgeous animal. I will prepare him cold, *sauce verte, garni de concombres.* Following, a little *salade cresson, fromages.* And to finish, my *Bavaroise au café.* No? It will be unforgettable!"

Since her mind had wandered off, unaccountably, after the fish, Lilly said nothing. Was it cucumbers they were having? She could still see the cucumber vines meandering all over the compost heap out back in the far Middle Western childhood which kept popping into her mind. How funny cucumber leaves had been, waving and flopping like summer hats on top of all that cow manure. She uncrossed her ankles for her thighs were getting sweaty. Then all at once she saw herself again, as she used to be, running all over in her floppy summer hats, only a little plump and so eager to be happy. Once Jimmy Thorne had said that her smile made him weak in the knees. And all her friends agreed that she was the prettiest. She thought she would probably have to cry, after Marie had left.

"Then, madame, we have decided everything. It only remains to telephone my fish. But my poor madame, why do

you look so unhappy? Tell Marie, I beg you, please do not look like this!"

Lilly didn't know why. She and Edward had met beside a Kansas swimming pool, long ago. Their feet had touched underwater. They had danced together. Right away he had been her god, and every time he smiled at her, she had felt blessed. Everyone said then how lucky she was, that Edward had a brilliant mind and would get to the top before long. They had married in October, she all in white and biting her lip to hold back her tears of joy. Now they were like two enemies standing over a friend's coffin in a huge house. Once the burial was over, they would never meet again. Lilly saw herself in the coffin. No one had dared put the lid on, yet, but it would have to be done soon. O God, please help me, Lilly thought, not having thought of Him for ages.

Marie was still waiting. Dear Marie, who had climbed all the way up the stairs in the heat.

"Marie," she finally asked, "what do you think I should wear tonight? I want to look my best, my very best, in honor of your fish."

"If you please," Marie said quickly, "the lavender dress of lace that shows a little of the décolleté. This is the one to wear tonight. In this dress madame looks like a very important lady. Very very distinguished."

"Do you really think so?"

"Madame, there is no question." Lilly couldn't quite trust, to this extent, the grave face above her. But she knew she loved it, and it had the power to make her feel oddly reckless, at times.

"And madame, to stay in this house all the time is very bad. Today you must go out a little, this afternoon."

"Well, I might, at that." Lilly nodded.

"Of course. One must have courage. Even in this terrible weather one must maintain oneself. So madame, you will do this, no? And I must go now, and see what all those crazy

idiots have been doing to my kitchen. The minute I turn my back, they are all sitting down smoking cigarettes and making me sick. Good-bye for now, my dear madame."

"Good-bye."

Marie left the room, her whispering espadrilles going away through the carpeted hallways in the front of the house to the closed dividing doorway. Now, Lilly thought, she will go down the back hall that smells of linoleum, down the back stairs that are narrow, down into the kitchen. She will burst in and shout commands, her voice like a trumpet calling her maids and grocery boys and cats and pots and pieces of meat. There the fan sucks out the stale air, and the chairs have been sat in for years. Even the colors have meaning: new peas' green, radiant white of onions, blood of strawberries. The shaping and peeling and cutting and throwing away is an old habit.

I would like to live in the kitchen, Lilly thought. I would shell the peas for her, and rattle them into the pot like little bursts of machine-gun fire!

She grunted, getting off the bed, and started for the bathroom. She would run the water a long time, as she did every day, wondering about joining the Red Cross, or perhaps going to an art gallery. Nobody notices you in the Red Cross, she would tell herself. And paintings don't care what you look like. "If only I were thin," she would sigh. "I must ask Marie to read *Losing Weight and Loving It,* I'm sure she would help me with the rules."

When Lilly at last got at her checkbook it was almost five o'clock, the time of day when she wished most that she had children. First she would take them into the flower room to see the birds, then they would sit on the sofa in the library and she would read to them. She would probably read *The Little Red Hen,* making all the noises for the animals so that they would laugh. Who will help me plant the wheat? asked the Litle Red Hen. Not I, said the fox. Not I, said the duck. Not I, said the pig. Then I'll do it myself, said the Little Red Hen,

and she did. Lilly stared on at her checkbook, trying to find some sort of sense in the leaning towers of numbers. But she couldn't seem to concentrate today. Edward would be home any minute now. He might come up to question her about it. Of course she would have to confess, since she had never told a lie to him in her life.

An hour later, when the checkbook had been put away and the cool air was unfurling in the evening trees outside, Lilly remembered, rather dizzily, what Marie had said. "In the lavender dress of lace, that shows a little of the décolleté, madame looks like a very important lady." Not knowing any reason, except that it was time for one last desperate attempt, Lilly decided to believe her. She decided to be, that night, a very important lady. It was the only way left of entering the living room, and besides, Marie had never told her anything that could be doubted. So tonight she would sit up straight on the needle-point sofa, smiling and talking to Julian and Helena, and asking John to pass around the peanuts once again, please. To Edward she would say how much checkbooks bored her, and would he be kind enough to have his secretary tend to hers in the future. And to them all, at the dinner table, she would relate the story of Marie's love affair with a fish, and in such a witty way that they all would laugh, even Edward, while she shrugged, murmuring lightly about what amusing things cooks came up with these days.

The improbability and daring of Lilly's decision alarmed her more than she realized. It had only made her lightheaded at first, but when she began to dress her hands were shaking, and the little beads of perspiration had appeared again along her lip. Dressing was a process that made her furious, an endless battle between her will and her resisting flesh. Bending over to pull on her stockings, she could scarcely control the desire to unhook her corset forever and just give up. But the decision had been made, and it was essential not to turn back now. She stepped into her pointed shoes.

When she had finished she went to stand before the mirror. There she observed her yellow-gray hair in its frizzy halo, and the low scoop of lace revealing the roots of her pent-up bosom with the crease between, like buttocks. She saw the enormity of her waistline and hips, and the flesh which hung from her arms like extra breasts. She saw herself with a final clarity, knowing that she was as deeply absurd as ever in her lavender best. But she had her decision firmly in hand, like a sword, and the heedless fluttering butterfly hope from Marie.

It was eight o'clock. Edward would have finished bathing, and would be waiting for her. The cocktail tray would have been brought in. The row of bottles would be standing behind the silver bowls of lemon peel and olives. She would go down now, and pause in the doorway to smile her good-evening. With slow tread, like a precarious queen, she started off.

When she got to the living room, Edward was talking on the telephone in the library, so she waited, standing up, near the piano. Then he came in carrying the evening paper. "They're fifteen minutes late," he said, not looking at her. "Julian ought to know better. I could do a lot for him, if he showed the proper spirit." He sat in his chair by the fire. She could only see the top of his head which was bald except for a few well-trained hairs combed straight across it. He would be frowning, she knew, while he read, his mouth slightly puckered as though he were whistling a perpetually inaudible little tune.

"Edward," she called to him across the intervening furniture. "I would like to talk to you a minute."

"Yes?"

"It's about my checkbook."

He turned a page of the paper and rattled it into place.

"I wish you would have your secretary do it for me in the future, please."

"My secretary? Why on earth should she do it? Can't you figure it out for yourself?"

"Well, I suppose I could. But it's begun to bore me so."

"Bore you, Lilly? How strange. What did you expect it to do?"

"Nothing. I don't know." Lilly pulled at the loose skin on her elbow.

"Checkbooks have bored people for years, Lilly, ever since they were invented. And any time you have something better to do, you come and tell me, and I'll give it to my secretary. But it doesn't seem to me that your life is busy enough, at this point, to warrant taking such a step."

Then the door-bell rang. Edward said, "Ah!" and strode into the front hall to greet the Brills. While he was gone, Lilly edged over to the sideboard. She popped four of Marie's hot cheese canapés into her mouth. Then she rearranged the parsley on the doily so that nothing showed.

Julian and Helena had never been as charming as they were that night. Helena sat before an open french door where her flickering face and white dress were perfect against the troubled leaves and darkness outside. It was always a shock to hear her voice, for she looked as though she might have come out of a convent for just one evening, and would have only gentle opinions, or at worst, might make a starlit vow of adoration to a handsome man far-off in a corner of the garden. But Helena was apt to throw back her head and make a surprisingly noisy attack upon the position of the government in Egypt. Lilly thought the men must wish she would just sit quietly so they could look at her, but they seemed delighted to listen and even accorded her the respect they usually reserved for each other.

Everyone was talking now, Helena's laughter ringing in, Julian mostly clearing his throat, Edward making his points, licking his lips between, pronouncing obscurely the names of obscure Moslem chieftains. Lilly sat straight still in her corner of the sofa, smiling from one to the other. She said nothing because she never read the front part of the paper any more,

only the column where a lady answered people's problems, and articles about dogs finding lost babies. Edward would never talk about her parts of the paper, unless there were an exceptionally brutal murder which he would retell, with great relish, as a joke. And everyone would laugh.

Lilly had hardly finished her third drink when John appeared again and took her glass. She couldn't hear the others very clearly any more, so she thought about John's mole bristling darkly under his white coat, and wondered whether his wife had minded it, if he had had a wife. When he brought her drink back, she noticed with some resentment that he had forgotten the cherry. Her shoes had begun to hurt, by now.

"I do think all this talk about foreign affairs gets to be an awful bore, don't you, Lilly?" Julian was leaning towards her, his jaw thrust out in a rather menacing way. "If they want to blow up the pyramids, we'll just get Edward here to build us some more, won't we?" Lilly nodded, and drank another large swallow to give her time to think of something to say. But her mind was blank as a piece of glass, and her only sensation a cold one, ice bumping against her upper lip. She could see Edward dimly, just beyond Julian's ear. He gestured in her direction and said something to Helena which she could not hear. Then he and Helena laughed.

Julian cleared his throat. "Tell me, Lilly," he went on, "I haven't seen you in a long time. What have you been doing with yourself lately?"

"Well," Lilly looked down at her gigantic lavender lap. Through the small inward shattering in her head, she heard her voice saying, quite loudly, "Well, Julian, to tell you the truth, today I thought I would go to the Forty-ninth Street Gallery, so I did. I had a marvelous time, too. There were so many paintings there, so many new things." She had spilled some bourbon on her knee, and the stain was growing. She dabbed at it with a tiny paper napkin which said "Lillian and

Edward" in green capital letters. Edward was looking at her now.

She stood up abruptly and raised her heavy arms until they were perpendicular to her body. The purple spots of underarm sweat were crescent moons as she turned her palms upwards and, looking at Edward, she said very quietly in the silence, "The most beautiful painting of all is of a Madonna and Child. The Child is looking straight ahead, and so is the Madonna. They are both looking at me, all the time, even now. Because I am a very important lady, in my way."

On her way out of the living room she knocked against an end-table, almost turning it over. When she got to the flower room there was hardly any light, but she could still make out her friends. "You are very sleepy, I know," she whispered to them, "and trembling and wobbling a bit the way you always do at night. But I came to say good-bye to you, because I am going away. I am going out to walk in the street." She could see clearly now how they all were shivering in the dark, so she turned around slowly to comfort them. "Dear thing," she said to the little red flower, the first one on the rose-geranium plant, "I will take you with me, if you want to come."

She picked it and stuck its stem into the lace at her bosom, where it nodded its head as she moved with unsteady grandeur out across the hallway.

Edward and the Brills were talking in low voices in the living room. They probably think I'm drunk, Lilly said to herself. She tried to close the front door quietly, but it always gave a clang, no matter how careful you were. As she reached the archway she heard Edward calling behind her, "Lilly, come back this minute. This is insane. Lilly! Where do you think you're going?" She began to run, then, with the preposterous haste of a frightened cow, until she was out of sight beyond the street-light at the corner.

Marie found her the next morning when she came down

to start the coffee. Her mistress must have come in, after everyone had gone to bed, by the kitchen door, and gotten only halfway up the back stairs before she collapsed. Marie summoned John, and between them they managed to haul her the rest of the way up and lift her into her bed. But they were unable to rouse her, though Marie put cold washcloths on her forehead.

Edward had to fly to California that morning. He called the doctor, and looked in on Lilly before he left. As he closed her door, he thought once more how lucky it was that only the Brills had been there. He would telephone Julian from Los Angeles and propose the business in Washington he had in mind.

GREGORY CORSO: Three Poems

Amnesia in Memphis

Who am I, flat beneath the shades of Isis,
This clay-skinned body, made study
By the physicians of Memphis?
Was it always my leaving the North
Snug on the back of the crocodile?
Do I remember this whorl of mummy cloth
As I stood fuming by the Nile?
O life abandoned! half-embalmed, I beat the soil,
Who I am I cannot regain
Nor sponge back my life with the charm of Ibis oil—
Still omen of the dribbling scarab,
Fate that leads me into the chamber of blue perfumes,
Is there no other worthy of prophecy
Than that decker who decks my spine with ostrich plumes?

No more will the scurvy Sphinx
With beggy prophets their prophecies relate;
The papyrus readers have seen the falcon's head
Fall unto the jackal's plate.

This Was My Meal

In the peas I saw upsidedown letters of Monk
And beside it in the Eyestares of Wine
I saw olive & blackhair
    I decided sunset to dine

I cut through the cowbrain and saw Christmas
& my birthday run hand in hand in the snow
    I cut deeper and Christmas
bled to the edge of the plate

I turned to my father and
he ate my birthday
I drank my milk and saw trees outrun themselves
    valleys outdo themselves
and no mountain stood a chance of not walking

Desert came quietly
    I wanted to drop fire engines from my mouth
but in ran the moonlight and grabbed the prunes

Poets Hitchhiking on the Highway

Of course I tried to tell him
but he cranked his head
    without an excuse.
I told him the sky chases
    the sun
And he smiled and said:
    "What's the use."
I was feeling like a demon
    again
So I said: "But the ocean chases
    the fish."
This time he laughed
    and said: "Suppose the
        strawberry were
            pushed into a mountain."
After that I knew the
    war was on—
So we fought:
He said: "The apple-cart like a
            broomstick-angel
        snaps & splinters
                old dutch shoes."
I said: "Lightning will strike the old oak
        and free the fumes!"
He said: "Mad street with no name."
I said: "Bald killer! Bald killer! Bald killer!"
He said, getting real mad,
        "Firestoves! Gas! Couch!"
I said, only smiling,
        "I know God would turn back his head
         if I sat quietly and thought."
We ended by melting away,
    hating the air!

The far-off sound . . .

The far-off sound of a wooden wheel
on a dusty road. If we turn to it
we are less real than it is.

And when to us old love comes mumbling its eye
and we would put our color in that circle
to be its reach
so the leap of youth is suddenly leveled.
So the fresh skin is wrinkling and settling
not of itself
but of form bone strict.

The rise contains the fall
like the circle contains the color
yet feelings of black or of white
are the shapes of our everydays.

Each fraction of the future
in each remembered act;
the progression of the circle
from dream to dreamier fact.

These are abstractions, and yet
something like these is the leap of some youth
leveled
suddenly a curving sound
from a once completely heard music
echos the wheel resounds
and the turn has becom
the one road

Traffic Complaint

a winter is coming
the parking lot's empty
municipal shepherds
a young man can do nothing.
men in your metal wombs
people laboring
these cops are not shepherds
and a winter is coming.
the garden is empty
birds fly in a circle
a young man can do nothing
and cities are laboring
and the sweet
car horns bleat
in the street

So why not

in painted April
(when real men are birds)
why, the humming
light bounces across the lake
and why shouldn't it?
then, to real men, women
double-talk when they walk
and why shouldn't they?
birds with three orange feet
can stand in a green pond.
sure why shouldn't a man be a bird?
yes, if he just
lifts his tufted head
to the painted and
testicle-loosening spectacle of April.

The buck is my benison . . .

The buck is my benison. With it I shall not want.
It giveth to me the bed of real silken,
Takes me to the polo, or to swill the waters,
It leads after me the willing woman; the humble artist is my boy.
It enters me into the correct houses, where few may go,
For its name is the first in our land.

Though I walk through the alleyways of slothful poverty
I shall not turn my head from the dirty places, for it is with me.
With my hand on my pouch I shall gaze at life's thinnesses
and preach them the universals of hardwork and cleanliving; recommending sunshine and comfort for all.

And to the very margins of my security I shall make all manner of generous bestowal, helping those who help themselves.
Surely there is enough for us all, for have we not all the chance to find salvation?
Go therefore into the highways and seek the keeper, and you shall dwell forever in the house of plenty.

Truly you shall lead a good, American life.

Up bright and early that day, I was young then, feeling awful, and out, mother hanging out of the window in her nightdress weeping and waving. Nice fresh morning, bright too early as so often. Feeling really awful, very violent. The sky would soon darken and rain fall and go on falling, all day, till evening. Then blue and sun again a second, then night. Feeling all this, how violent and the kind of day, I stopped and turned. So back with bowed head on the lookout for a snail, slug or worm. Great love in my heart too for all things still and rooted, bushes, boulders and the like, too numerous to mention, even the flowers of the field, not for the world when in my right senses would I ever touch one, to pluck it. Whereas a bird now, or a butterfly, fluttering about and getting in my way, all moving things, getting in my path, a slug now, getting under my feet, no, no mercy. Not that I'd go out of my way to get at them, no, at a distance often they seemed still, then a moment later they were upon me. Birds with my piercing sight I have seen flying so high, so far, that they seemed at rest, then the next minute they were all about me, crows have done this. Ducks are perhaps the worst, to be suddenly stamping and stumbling in the midst of ducks, or hens, any class of poultry, few things are worse. Nor will I go out of my way to avoid such things, when avoidable, no, I simply will not go out of my way, though I have never in my life been on my way anywhere, but simply on my way. And in this way I have gone through great thickets, bleeding, and deep into bogs, water too, even the sea in some moods and been carried out of my course, or driven back, so as not to drown. And that is perhaps how I shall die at last if they don't catch me, I mean drowned, or in fire, yes, perhaps that is how I shall do it at last, walking furious headlong into fire and dying burnt to bits. Then I raised my eyes and saw my mother still in the window waving, waving me back or on I didn't know, or just

waving, in sad helpless love, and I heard faintly her cries. The window-frame was green, pale, the house-wall grey and my mother white and so thin I could see past her (piercing sight I had then) into the dark of the room, and on all that full the not long risen sun, and all small because of the distance, very pretty really the whole thing, I remember it, the old grey and then the thin green surround and the thin white against the dark, if only she could have been still and let me look at it all. No, for once I wanted to stand and look at something I couldn't with her there waving and fluttering and swaying in and out of the window as though she were doing exercises, and for all I know she may have been, not bothering about me at all. No tenacity of purpose, that was another thing I didn't like in her. One week it would be exercises, and the next prayers and bible reading, and the next gardening, and the next playing the piano and singing, that was awful, and then just lying about and resting, always changing. Not that it mattered to me, I was always out. But let me get on with the day I have hit on to begin with, any other would have done as well, yes, on with it and out of my way and on to another, enough of my mother for the moment. Well then for a time all well, no trouble, no birds at me, nothing across my path except at a great distance a white horse followed by a boy, or it might have been a small man or woman. This is the only completely white horse I remember, what I believe the Germans call a Schimmel, oh I was very quick as a boy and picked up a lot of hard knowledge, Schimmel, nice word, for an English speaker. The sun was full upon it, as shortly before on my mother, and it seemed to have a red band or stripe running down its side, I thought perhaps a bellyband, perhaps the horse was going somewhere to be harnessed, to a trap or suchlike. It crossed my path a long way off, then vanished behind greenery I suppose, all I noticed was the sudden appearance of the horse, then disappearance. It was bright white, with the sun on it, I had never seen

such a horse, though often heard of them, and never saw another. White I must say has always affected me strongly, all white things, sheets, walls and so on, even flowers, and then just white, the thought of white, without more. But let me get on with this day and get it over. All well then for a time, just the violence and then this white horse, when suddenly I flew into a most savage rage, really blinding. Now why this sudden rage I really don't know, these sudden rages, they made my life a misery. Many other things too did this, my sore throat for example, I have never known what it is to be without a sore throat, but the rages were the worst, like a great wind suddenly rising in me, no, I can't describe. It wasn't the violence getting worse in any case, nothing to do with that, some days I would be feeling violent all day and never have a rage, other days quite mild for me and have four or five. No, there's no accounting for it, there's no accounting for anything, with a mind like the one I always had, always on the alert against itself, I'll come back on this perhaps when I feel less weak. There was a time I tried to get relief by beating my head against something, but I gave it up. The best thing I found was to start running. Perhaps I should mention here I was a very slow walker. I didn't dally or loiter in any way, just walked very slowly, little short steps and the feet very slow through the air. On the other hand I must have been quite one of the fastest runners the world has ever seen, over a short distance, five or ten yards, in a second I was there. But I could not go on at that speed, not for breathlessness, it was mental, all is mental, figments. Now the jog trot on the other hand, I could no more do that than I could fly. No, with me all was slow, and then these flashes, or gushes, vent the pent, that was one of those things I used to say, over and over, as I went along, vent the pent, vent the pent. Fortunately my father died when I was a boy, otherwise I might have been a professor, he had set his heart on it. A very fair scholar I was too, no thought, but a great memory. One day I told

him about Milton's cosmology, away up in the mountains we were, resting against a huge rock looking out to the sea, that impressed him greatly. Love too, often in my thoughts, when a boy, but not a great deal compared to other boys, it kept me awake I found. Never loved anyone I think, I'd remember. Except in my dreams, and there it was animals, dream animals, nothing like what you see walking about the country, I couldn't describe them, lovely creatures they were, white mostly. In a way perhaps it's a pity, a good woman might have been the making of me, I might be sprawling in the sun now sucking my pipe and patting the bottoms of the third generation, looked up to and respected, wondering what there was for dinner, instead of stravaging the same old roads in all weathers, I was never much of a one for new ground. No, I regret nothing, all I regret is having been born, dying is such a long tiresome business I always found. But let me get on now from where I left off, the white horse and then the rage, no connexion I suppose. But why go on with all this, I don't know, some day I must end, why not now. But these are thoughts, not mine, no matter, shame upon me. Now I am old and weak, in pain and weakness murmur why and pause, and the old thoughts well up in me and over into my voice, the old thoughts born with me and grown with me and kept under, there's another. No, back to that far day, any far day, and from the dim granted ground to its things and sky the eyes raised and back again, raised again and back again again, and the feet going nowhere only somehow home, in the morning out from home and in the evening back home again, and the sound of my voice all day long muttering the same old things I don't listen to, not even mine it was at the end of the day, like a marmoset sitting on my shoulder with its bushy tail, keeping me company. All this talking, very low and hoarse, no wonder I had a sore throat. Perhaps I should mention here that I never talked to anyone, I think my father was the last one I talked to. My mother was the same, never

talked, never answered, since my father died. I asked her for the money, I can't go back on that now, those must have been my last words to her. Sometimes she cried out on me, or implored, but never long, just a few cries, then if I looked up the poor old thin lips pressed tight together and the body turned away and just the corners of the eyes on me, but it was rare. Sometimes in the night I heard her, talking to herself I suppose, or praying out loud, or reading out loud, or reciting her hymns, poor woman. Well after the horse and rage I don't know, just on, then I suppose the slow turn, wheeling more and more to the one or other hand, till facing home, then home. Ah, my father and mother, to think they are probably in paradise, they were so good. Let me go to hell, that's all I ask, and go on cursing them there, and them look down and hear me, that might take some of the shine off their bliss. Yes, I believe all their blather about the life to come, it cheers me up, and unhappiness like mine, there's no annihilating that. I was mad of course, and still am, but harmless, I passed for harmless, that's a good one. Not of course that I was really mad, just strange, a little strange, and with every passing year a little stranger, there can be few stranger creatures going about than me at the present day. My father, did I kill him too as well as my mother, perhaps in a way I did, but I can't go into that now, much too old and weak. The questions float up as I go along and leave me very confused, breaking up I am. Suddenly they are there, no, they float up, out of an old depth, and hover and linger before they die away, questions that when I was in my right mind would not have survived one second, no, but atomized they would have been, before as much as formed, atomized. In twos often they came, one hard on the other, thus, How shall I go on another day? and then, How did I ever go on another day? Or, Did I kill my father? and then, Did I ever kill anyone? That kind of way, to the general from the particular I suppose you might say, question and answer too in a

way, very addling. I strive with them as best I can, quickening my step when they come on, tossing my head from side to side and up and down, staring agonizedly at this and that, increasing my murmur to a scream, these are helps. But they should not be necessary, something is wrong here, if it was the end I would not so much mind, but how often I have said, in my life, before some new awful thing, It is the end, and it was not the end, and yet the end cannot be far off now, I shall fall as I go along and stay down or curl up for the night as usual among the rocks and before morning be gone. Oh I know I too shall cease and be as when I was not yet, only all over instead of in store, that makes me happy, often now my murmur falters and dies and I weep for happiness as I go along and for love of this old earth that has carried me so long and whose uncomplainingness will soon be mine. Just under the surface I shall be, all together at first, then separate and drift, through all the earth and perhaps in the end through a cliff into the sea, something of me. A ton of worms in an acre, that is a wonderful thought, a ton of worms, I believe it. Where did I get it, from a dream, or a book read in a nook when a boy, or a word overheard as I went along, or in me all along and kept under till it could give me joy, these are the kind of horrid thoughts I have to contend with in the way I have said. Now is there nothing to add to this day with the white horse and white mother in the window, please read again my descriptions of these, before I get on to some other day at a later time, nothing to add before I move on in time skipping hundreds and even thousands of days in a way I could not at the time, but had to get through somehow until I came to the one I am coming to now, no, nothing, all has gone but mother in the window, the violence, rage and rain. So on to this second day and get it over and out of my way and on to the next. What happens now is I was set on and pursued by a family or tribe, I do not know, of stoats, a most extraordinary thing, I think they were stoats.

Indeed if I may say so I think I was fortunate to get off with my life, strange expression, it does not sound right somehow. Anyone else would have been bitten and bled to death, perhaps sucked white, like a rabbit, there is that word white again. I know I could never think, but if I could have, and then had, I would just have lain down and let myself be destroyed, as the rabbit does. But let me start as always with the morning and the getting out. When a day comes back, whatever the reason, then its morning and its evening too are there, though in themselves quite unremarkable, the going out and coming home, there is a remarkable thing I find. So up then in the grey of dawn very weak and shaky after an atrocious night little dreaming what lay in store, out and off. What time of year, I really do not know, does it matter. Not wet really, but dripping, everything dripping, the day might rise, did it, no, drip drip all day long, no sun, no change of light, dim all day, and still, not a breath, till night, then black, and a little wind, I saw some stars, as I neared home. My stick of course, by a merciful providence, I shall not say this again, when not mentioned my stick is in my hand, as I go along. But not my long coat, just my jacket, I could never bear the long coat, flapping about my legs, or rather one day suddenly I turned against it, a sudden violent dislike. Often when dressed to go I would take it out and put it on, then stand in the middle of the room unable to move, until at last I could take it off and put it back on its hanger, in the cupboard. But I was hardly down the stairs and out into the air when the stick fell from my hand and I just sank to my knees to the ground and then forward on my face, a most extraordinary thing, and then after a little over on my back, I could never lie on my face for any length of time, much as I loved it, it made me feel sick, and lay there, half an hour perhaps, with my arms along my sides and the palms of my hands against the pebbles and my eyes wide open straying over the sky. Now was this my first experience of this kind, that is the question

that immediately assails one. Falls I had had in plenty, of the kind after which unless a limb broken you pick yourself up and go on, cursing god and man, very different from this. With so much life gone from knowledge how know when all began, all the variants of the one that one by one their venom staling follow upon one another, all life long, till you succumb. So in some way even olden things each time are first things, no two breaths the same, all a going over and over and all once and never more. But let me get up now and on and get this awful day over and on to the next. But what is the sense of going on with all this, there is none. Day after unremembered day until my mother's death, then in a new place soon old until my own. And when I come to this night here among the rocks with my two books and the strong starlight it will have pased from me and the day that went before, my two books, the little and the big, all past and gone, or perhaps just moments here and there still, this little sound perhaps now that I don't understand so that I gather up my things and go back into my hole, so bygone they can be told. Over, over, there is a soft place in my heart for all that is over, no, for the being over, I love the word, words have been my only loves, not many. Often all day long as I went along I have said it, and sometimes I would be saying vero, oh vero. Oh but for those awful fidgets I have always had I would have lived my life in a big empty echoing room with a big old pendulum clock, just listening and dozing, the case open so that I could watch the swinging, moving my eyes to and fro, and the lead weights dangling lower and lower till I got up out of my chair and wound them up again, once a week. The third day was the look I got from the roadman, suddenly I see that now, the ragged old brute bent double down in the ditch leaning on his spade or whatever it was and leering round and up at me from under the brim of his slouch, the red mouth, how is it I wonder I saw him at all, that is more like it, the day I saw the look I got from Balfe, I went in terror of him as a child.

Now he is dead and I resemble him. But let us get on and leave these old scenes and come to these, and my reward. Then it will not be as now, day after day, out, on, round, back, in, like leaves turning, or torn out and thrown crumpled away, but a long unbroken time without before or after, light or dark, from or towards or at, the old half knowledge of when and where gone, and of what, but kinds of things still, all at once, all going, until nothing, there was never anything, never can be, life and death all nothing, that kind of thing, only a voice dreaming and droning on all around, that is something, the voice that once was in your mouth. Well once out on the road and free of the property what then, I really do not know, the next thing I was up in the bracken lashing about with my stick making the drops fly and cursing, filthy language, the same words over and over, I hope nobody heard me. Throat very bad, to swallow was torment, and something wrong with an ear, I kept poking at it without relief, old wax perhaps pressing on the drum. Extraordinary still over the land, and in me too all quite still, a coincidence, why the curses were pouring out of me I do not know, no, that is a foolish thing to say, and the lashing about with the stick, what possessed me mild and weak to be doing that, as I struggled along. Is it the stoats now, no, first I just sink down again and disappear in the ferns, up to my waist they were as I went along. Harsh things these great ferns, like starched, very woody, terrible stalks, take the skin off your legs through your trousers, and then the holes they hide, break your leg if you're not careful, awful English this, fall and vanish from view, you could lie there for weeks and no one hear you, I often thought of that up in the mountains, no, that is a foolish thing to say, just went on, my body doing its best without me.

Paternity

Adam Gent was ribbed for Eve,
Delved while the lady lorded.
It was her business to conceive—
He could not afford it.

He thought she wove those little men
Out of the apple cores.
Thusly span the Queen of Eden—
Adam did the chores.

His brutish mind he late employed
And went to school of varmints.
Utility now plainly cloyed
The pleasures of performance.

Not you but I am god, he crowed,
I am the whole world's father!
The garden went to weed and wood—
Adam couldn't bother.

Now he has fallen from her grace,
His leer the primal error.
Conflict is the commonplace
And Eden mulched forever.

Adam Gent has delved his bed,
The dead are dead though male,
And weaving Eve knows though she wed
To wive ends in travail.

View from an Airliner

The landscape is a king's face
After Rouault, streams leaded
Into the window-wide farms
With black strokes: winter
Has washed the glass. Where
Are the painted kine, the fat
Cattle that multiplied
In the seven rich years I ruled
Before the plagues of age?

I was a king who chambered
In clapboard hideouts, mustangs
At my elbow, meadow and pool
A moat in the midst of domain.
Failure's here more than the Jew saw
Eye to eye with the arid Nile,
Or winter proscribes, or men
Flying over dream they did
Under the longbow's shadow.

The kingdom is cut off
By the progress of a wing.
Though the river stays, a tear
In canvas, crayon-black willows
Guiding the path of the knife,
The artist's surgeon defiance,
The regicide is here
In the craft that creaks him out
False-bearded like a Jove.

He cannot abide the slow
Dissolving of the cold,
The slow upspringing flush
That bloods the lazar's cheek
In chapel, the slow renewal.
Strapped for ascent he sits
And watches the window blur,
The awesome altitude
Roll in, unbordered, void.

Jackson Pollock was born on January 28, 1912, in Cody, Wyoming, the youngest of five sons of Le Roy and Stella (née McClure) Pollock. His father, who was first a farmer and then a surveyor, had been born Le Roy McCoy, but took the name of Pollock from the family by which he was adopted as a child. (He died in 1933.) In 1915 the Pollocks moved to Arizona, and from there, in 1918, to Northern California, then back to Arizona in 1923, and finally to Southern California in 1925.

Pollock became interested in art during adolescence, following the example of his oldest brother, Charles, a painter who now teaches at Michigan State College. He studied art at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles (where one of his classmates was Philip Guston) with the intention of becoming a sculptor, but soon changed to painting. (Sculpture haunted him to his last days, though he made but few and desultory attempts at it in his maturity.) Leaving high school without graduating, Pollock came to New York in 1929 to study under Thomas Benton at the Art Students League, where he continued until 1931. He made several trips back to the West before 1935, but from then on lived more or less permanently in New York. From 1938 to 1942 he was employed on the Federal Art Project as an easel painter.

Pollock's work was first seen by the New York public in 1940, in a group show of French and American paintings organized by John Graham and held at the McMillan Gallery. Among the other Americans included were Willem de Kooning and Leonore (Lee) Krasner, a former student of Hans Hofmann's. She first met Pollock on this occasion, and they were married in 1944, but even before their marriage her eye and judgment had become important to his art, and continued to remain so.

In 1943 Pollock's work caught the attention of Peggy Guggenheim and her associate, the late Howard Putzel, and in November of the same year his first one-man show was held at their Art of This Century Gallery on West 57th Street. Miss Guggenheim's and Putzel's confidence in him showed itself in the form of a contract for his production that was renewed annually until the end of 1947, in which year Miss Guggenheim closed her gallery and returned to Europe. In 1946 the Pollocks were able to move out to Springs, near East Hampton on Long Island, and buy a house there.

He had a one-man show every year between 1943 and 1953: at Art of This Century until 1947; at the Betty Parsons Gallery from 1948 to 1951; and at the Janis Gallery in 1952 and 1953. His first retrospective was put on at Bennington and Williams colleges in 1952, his second at the Janis Gallery in 1954, and his third in 1957, after his death, at the Museum of Modern Art. A fourth retrospective, organized by the Museum of Modern Art, was presented at the 1957 Bienal in São Paulo, Brazil, and is now traveling in Europe. His first one-man show in Europe was held in Paris in 1952 at the Galerie Michel Tapié, Studio Paul Facchetti, and the same works were shown in the following year at the Kunsthaus in Zurich. Although the Museum of Modern Art and the San Francisco Museum of Art acquired Pollock's work early on, his first sales in appreciable quantity came only in 1949 and 1950. Another lean period followed during which purchases by Alfonso Ossorio, a fellow-painter, helped ease an otherwise trying situation, and it is only since 1952 or 1953 that Pollocks have been in steady demand.

Pollock produced relatively little during the last three years of his life. On the night of August 11, 1956, he was killed in an automobile accident. He was buried in Springs cemetery in accordance with a wish he had expressed some time before.

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET: A Fresh Start for Fiction

The novel passes for a minor art only because of its obstinate attachment to exhausted techniques. —NATHALIE SARRAUTE

It is scarcely reasonable, at first glance, to think that a *new* literature may one day—now, for example—be possible. The many attempts which have been made for more than fifty years to pull the art of narrative out of its rut have resulted, at best, in merely a few isolated works. None of these, whatever its interest, has attracted a public comparable to that enjoyed by the bourgeois novel. The only conception of the novel in effect today remains, in fact, that of Balzac.

Or one might go further and say, that of Madame de la Fayette. Already sacrosanct in her age, psychological analysis constituted the basis of all prose: presided at the conception of the book, at the description of its characters, at the development of its plot. A *good* novel, ever since, has remained the study of a passion—or a conflict of passions, or the absence of passion—in a given milieu. Most contemporary novelists of the traditional sort—those, that is, who actually win the approval of their readers—could insert long passages from *La Princesse de Clèves* or from *Père Goriot* into their own books without awakening the least suspicion in the vast public which devours whatever they turn out. They would scarcely need to change more than a phrase here and there, modify certain constructions, give a glimpse of their own "manner" by means of a word, a "daring" image, the rhythm of a sentence. . . . But all of them admit, without seeing anything peculiar about it, that their preoccupations as writers date back several centuries.

What is there to be surprised at in this? The raw material—the French language—has undergone only very slight modifications for three hundred years; and, while society has

transformed itself little by little, while industrial techniques have made considerable progress, our intellectual civilization has remained precisely the same. We live according to essentially the same habits and prohibitions—moral, alimentary, religious, sexual, hygienic, familial, etc. And of course there is always the human "heart," which, as everyone knows, is eternal. There's nothing new under the sun, it's all been said before, we've come on the stage too late, etc.

The risk of encountering such objections is merely increased if one dares claim that this new literature is not only possible in the future, but is already being written, and that it is going to represent—in its fulfillment—a revolution more total than those from which such movements as romanticism and naturalism were born.

Such promises as "Now things are going to change!" will invariably meet with ridicule. How will they go about changing? In what direction? And—especially—why now?

The art of the novel, however, has achieved such a degree of stagnation—a lassitude noted and remarked on by almost the whole of criticism—that it is scarcely imaginable that it can survive for long without radical changes. To minds of many, the solution is simple indeed: no change is possible, the art of the novel is in the process of dying. We have no such guarantees. History will reveal, in a few decades, whether the various fits and starts which have been noted are signs of a death agony or a rebirth.

In any case, one must not deceive oneself as to the difficulties such a revolution will encounter. They are considerable. The whole caste system of our literary life (from publisher to the most modest reader, including bookseller and critic) has no choice but to fight against the unknown form which is attempting to establish itself. The minds best disposed toward the idea of a necessary transformation, those most willing to countenance and even recognize the values of experiment, remain, in spite of everything, the heirs of a tradi-

tion. A new form always seems to be more or less an absence of any form at all, since it is unconsciously judged by reference to consecrated forms. In one of our most celebrated encyclopedic dictionaries, we can read, in an article on Schoenberg: ". . . author of audacious works, written without regard for any rules whatever"! This brief judgment is found under the heading *Music*, evidently written by a specialist.

The stammering, newborn work will always be regarded as a monster, even by those who find the experiment fascinating. There will be some curiosity, of course, some gestures of interest, always some provision for the future. And some praise; though what is sincere will always be addressed to the vestiges of what is already familiar, to all those bonds from which the new work has not yet broken and which desperately seek to imprison it in the past.

For if the norms of the past serve to measure the present, they also can be used to construct it. The writer himself, despite his will to be independent, is situated in an intellectual civilization and a literature—that is, what *has been* written, a literature of the past. It is impossible for him to escape altogether from this tradition of which he is the product. Sometimes even the elements he has tried the hardest to uproot seem, on the contrary, to bloom more vigorously than ever in the very work by which he had hoped to destroy them; and he will be congratulated, of course, with relief, for having cultivated them so reverently.

Thus it will undoubtedly be those who specialize in the novel (novelists, critics, fanatic readers) who will have the most difficulty pulling themselves out of its rut.

Even the least "conditioned" observer is unable to look at the world which surrounds him with entirely unprejudiced eyes. There is no question of reviving that naïve concern for objectivity at which the analyst of the soul (subjective) finds it so easy to smile. Objectivity in the general sense of the

term—total impersonality of observation—is all too evidently an illusion. But *freedom* of observation *should* be possible, and yet, unfortunately, it is not. At every instant, a continuous fringe of culture (psychology, ethics, metaphysics, etc.) is being added to things, disguising their real strangeness, making them more comprehensible, more reassuring. Sometimes the camouflage is complete: a gesture slips from our mind, supplanted by the emotions which supposedly produced it, and we remember a landscape as *austere* or *calm* without being able to evoke a single outline, a single determining element. Even if we immediately think, "That's literary," we don't try to react against it. We accept the fact that what is *literary* (the word has become pejorative) functions as a screen set with bits of variously colored glass that fracture our field of vision into tiny assimilable facets.

And if something resists this systematic appropriation of the visual, if an element of the world breaks in on us without finding any place in the interpretive screen, we can always make use of our convenient category of the "absurd" to absorb this awkward residue.

But the world is neither significant nor absurd. It *is*, quite simply. That, in any case, is the most remarkable thing about it. And suddenly this evidence strikes us with irresistible force. All at once the whole beautiful construction collapses: opening our eyes to the unexpected, we have experienced once too often the shock of this stubborn reality we were pretending to have mastered. Around us, defying the mob of our animistic or protective adjectives, the things *are there*. Their surfaces are clear and smooth, *intact*, neither dubiously glittering, nor transparent. All our literature has not yet succeeded in penetrating their smallest corner, in softening their slightest curve.

The innumerable filmed novels encumbering our screens provide us an occasion for reliving this curious experience as

often as we like. The cinema, another heir of the psychological and naturalist tradition, more often than not has as its sole purpose the transposition of a story into images: it aims exclusively at imposing on the spectator, through the intermediary of some well-chosen scenes, the same meaning that the sentences had for the reader. But at any given moment the filmed story can draw us out of our interior comfort toward this proffered world with a violence that one would seek in vain in the corresponding text, whether novel or scenario.

One can readily perceive the nature of the transformation. In the original novel, the objects and gestures forming the very tissue of the plot disappeared completely, leaving behind only their *significations*: the empty chair became only absence or expectation, the hand placed on a shoulder became a sign of friendliness, the bars on the window became only the impossibility of leaving. . . . But in the cinema, one *sees* the chair *too*, the movement of the hand, the shape of the bars. What they signify remains obvious, but, instead of monopolizing our attention, it becomes something added, even something in excess, because what touches us, what persists in our memory, what appears as essential and irreducible to vague intellectual concepts, are the gestures themselves, the objects, the movements, and the contours, to which the image has suddenly (and unintentionally) restored their *reality*.

It may seem arbitrary that such fragments of crude reality in the film narrative, which the camera cannot help presenting, strike us so vividly, whereas identical scenes in real life do not suffice to free us of our blindness. Actually, it is as if the very conventions of the photographic medium (the two dimensions, the black-and-white images, the frame of the screen, the difference of scale between scenes) help to free us from our own conventions. The slightly "unaccustomed" aspect of this reproduced world reveals at the same time the unaccustomed character of the world that surrounds us: un-

accustomed, too, to the degree that it refuses to conform to our habits of apprehension and to our demands.

Instead of this universe of "signification" (psychological, social, functional) we must try to construct a world both more solid and more immediate. Let it be first of all by their *presence* that objects and gestures impose themselves, and let this presence continue to make itself felt beyond all explanatory theory that might try to enclose it in some system of reference, whether sentimental, sociological, Freudian, or metaphysical.

In this future universe of the novel, gestures and objects will be "there" before being "something"; and they will still be there afterwards, hard, unalterable, eternally present, mocking their own meaning, which tries in vain to reduce them to the role of precarious tools between a formless past and an indeterminate future.

Thus objects will little by little lose their inconsistency and their secrets; will renounce their false mystery, that suspect interiority which Roland Barthes has called the "romantic 'heart' of things." No longer will objects be merely the vague reflection of the hero's vague soul, the image of his torments, the mainstay of his desires. Or rather, if objects must still accept this tyranny, it will be only in appearance, only to show all the more clearly to what extent they remain independent and alien.

As for the novel's characters, they may in themselves be rich with multiple interpretations; they may, according to the preoccupations of each author, give rise to all kinds of commentaries—psychological, psychiatric, religious, or political, yet their indifference to these supposed riches will quickly be apparent. Whereas the traditional hero is constantly incited, cornered, and destroyed by these "interpretations" proposed by the author, and endlessly rejected into an immaterial

and unstable *elsewhere*, always more remote and blurred, the future hero of the novel will remain, on the contrary, "there." It is the commentaries which will seek "elsewhere"; in the face of his irrefutable presence, they will appear useless, superfluous, even dishonest.

All this might seem very theoretical, very illusory, if something were not actually changing—changing totally, definitively—in our relationships with the universe. Which is why we glimpse an answer to the old ironic question, "Why now?" There is today, in fact, a new element that separates us—this time radically—from Balzac, as from Gide or Madame de la Fayette: it is the dismissal of the old myth of "depth."

We know that the whole literature of the novel was based on this myth, and on it alone. The traditional role of the writer consisted in excavating Nature, in burrowing deeper and deeper to reach some ever more intimate strata, in finally bringing to light some fragment of a disconcerting secret. Having descended into the abyss of human passions, he would send to the seemingly tranquil world (the one on the surface) triumphant messages describing the mysteries he had actually touched with his own hands. And the sacred dizziness that then seized the reader, far from causing him anguish or nausea, reassured him as to his power of domination over the world. There were chasms, certainly, but thanks to such valiant speliologists, their depths could be sounded.

It is not surprising, given these conditions, that the literary phenomenon par excellence has resided in this one word, so all-inclusive and unique, which attempts to summon up all the inner qualities, the hidden *soul* of things. *Profundity* has functioned like a trap in which the writer captured the universe in order to hand it over to society.

The revolution which has taken place is in proportion to the power of the old order. Not only do we no longer con-

sider the world as our very own, our private property, designed according to our needs and readily domesticated, but we no longer believe in its "depth."

While essentialist conceptions of man were facing their destruction, the notion of "condition" replaced that of "nature," the *surface* of things ceased being the mask that concealed their "heart" (a door opening on the worst "beyonds" of metaphysics).

It is therefore the whole literary language that has to change, that is changing already. We witness from day to day the growing repugnance that people of greater awareness feel for words of a visceral, analogical, incantatory character. On the other hand, the visual or descriptive adjective—the word that contents itself with measuring, locating, limiting, defining—indicates a difficult but most likely direction for the novel of the future.

—Translated by Richard Howard

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET: Three Reflected Visions

1. The Dressmaker's Dummy

The coffee pot is on the table.

It is a round table with four legs, covered with an oilcloth checkered red and gray on a neutral background—a yellowish-white that was once ivory, perhaps, or just white. In the middle of the table is a porcelain tile instead of the usual table mat: the design on the tile is completely covered, or at least made unrecognizable, by the coffee pot that is standing on it.

The coffee pot is made of brown earthenware. It is in the form of a sphere surmounted by a cylindrical percolator and a mushroom-shaped lid. The spout is an S with flattened sides, slightly more rounded at the base. The handle has more or less the shape of an ear, or rather of the outer rim of an ear. Even so, it would be a deformed ear—too round and without enough lobe: more or less an ear shaped like a pot handle. The spout, the handle, and the mushroom-shaped lid are cream color. The rest of the pot is a bright, shiny, even shade of brown.

There is nothing else on the table except the oilcloth, the tile and the coffee pot.

To the right, in front of the window, stands the dressmaker's dummy.

Behind the table, on the mantlepiece, is a large rectangular mirror in which can be seen half the french window (the right half), and, to the left (that is, to the left of the window), the reflection of the mirrored wardrobe. In the mirror of the wardrobe the window can be seen again, all of it this time, and the right way around (that is, the right half on the right, the left half on the left).

Thus, above the mantlepiece there are actually three halves of the window that can be successively distinguished without a break in continuity—they are, respectively (from left to right), the left half seen the right way around, the right half,

also seen the right way around, and the right half seen in reverse. Since the wardrobe is standing exactly in the corner of the room, extending as far as the edge of the window, the two right halves of the window appear to be separated only by a narrow upright of the wardrobe, which could also be part of the window frame (the right upright of the left half exactly overlaps the left upright of the right half). The three halves make it possible to see, on the other side of the window screen, the leafless trees of the garden.

In this way, the window occupies the entire surface of the mirror except for the upper portion, in which can be seen a strip of the ceiling and the top of the mirrored wardrobe.

Also in the mirror on the mantlepiece can be seen two other dummies, one in front of the first, narrowest section of the window, all the way to the left; and the other in front of the third half (the one farthest to the right). The dummies are neither facing toward nor away from one another; the one on the right is turned so that its right side is facing toward the one on the left, which is slightly smaller and standing with its left side turned to face the one on the right. But this is hard to discern at first glance, for the two reflections are actually facing the same way and both therefore seem to be showing the same side—probably the left one.

The three dummies are standing in a row. The one in the middle, placed on the right side of the mirror, and about as much larger than the one on its right as it is smaller than the other one on its left, is facing in exactly the same direction on the table.

On the spherical part of the coffee pot there is a distorted reflection of the window, a more or less quadrilateral figure with its sides composed of circular arcs. The line formed by the wooden uprights between the two halves of the window suddenly spreads out at the bottom of this reflection into a rather shapeless blotch. This is certainly the shadow of the dummy.

The room is very bright, for the window is exceptionally large, although it has only two sections.

A good smell of hot coffee is coming out of the coffee pot on the table.

The dummy is not where it belongs: usually it is kept in the angle of the window, on the side opposite the mirrored wardrobe. The wardrobe has been put where it is to make fittings more convenient.

The design on the tile is an owl with two huge, almost frightening eyes. But, for the moment, nothing can be seen because of the coffee pot.

2. The Substitute

The high-school student stepped back a little and lifted his head toward the lowest branches. Then he moved forward to catch hold of a twig that seemed to be within his reach; he stood on tiptoe and stretched out his hand as high as he could, but did not manage to reach it. After several fruitless attempts he appeared to give up. He lowered his arm and continued merely staring at something in the foliage.

Then he returned to the foot of the tree, where he stood in the same position as at first: his knees slightly bent, his body inclined toward the right, his head leaning toward his shoulder. He was still holding his satchel in his left hand. His other hand couldn't be seen, but he was doubtless holding it against the trunk, next to his face, which was almost touching the bark, as if he were looking very closely at some minute detail about four feet from the ground.

The child had stopped reading again, but this time there must have been a period, perhaps even an indentation, and he was probably trying to indicate the end of a paragraph. The high-school student straightened up to inspect the bark a little higher.

Whispering broke out in several parts of the classroom. The teacher turned his head and noticed that most of the students

had raised their eyes instead of following the reading in their texts: the reader himself was looking toward the rostrum with a vaguely questioning, perhaps timorous expression. The teacher said severely, "Why don't you go on? What are you waiting for?"

Every head was lowered in silence, and the child continued in the same diligent tone, without intonation and a trifle too slowly, giving each word an identical weight, spacing them all uniformly: "'That evening, Joseph de Hagen, one of Phillip's lieutenants, presented himself at the archbishop's palace, supposedly as an act of courtesy. As we have said above the two brothers . . .'"

On the other side of the street, the student was staring into the low branches again. The teacher rapped on the desk with the flat of his hand. "As we have said above, comma, the two brothers . . ." He found the passage again in his own book and read it aloud, exaggerating the punctuation: "Repeat after me, 'As we have said above, the two brothers were there already, in order to be able, should the occasion arise, to shield themselves behind this alibi.' And pay attention to what you are reading."

After a pause the child began the sentence again, "'As we have said above, the two brothers were there already, in order to be able, should the occasion arise, to shield themselves behind this alibi—which was, in truth, a dubious one, but, nevertheless, the best they could devise in the situation—to prevent their suspicious cousin . . .'"

The monotonous voice suddenly came to a stop in the middle of a sentence. The other students, who were already lifting their heads toward the paper jumping-jack hanging on the wall, immediately plunged back into their books. The teacher turned his eyes away from the window toward the reader, who was sitting opposite him in the first row of chairs, near the the door. "Well, go on. There's no period there. You don't seem to understand what you are reading!"

The child looked at the teacher, and past him, a little to the right, at the white paper jumping-jack. "Do you understand what you are reading—yes or no?"

"Yes," said the child in a shaky voice.

"Yes, *sir*," corrected the teacher.

"Yes, sir," repeated the child.

The teacher looked down at his book and asked, "What do you think the word 'alibi' means?"

The child looked at the clown cut out of white paper, then at the blank wall straight in front of him, then at the book on his desk; then at the wall again, for almost a minute.

"Well?"

"I don't know, sir," said the child.

The teacher slowly inspected the class. One student near the window at the back of the room raised his hand. The teacher pointed his finger at him and the boy stood up from his bench. "So people would think they were there, sir."

"Who were there? What do you mean?"

"The two brothers, sir."

"Where did they want people to think they were?"

"In the city, sir, at the archbishop's palace."

"And where were they, actually?"

The child reflected a moment before answering. "They were really there, sir, but they wanted to go somewhere else and make everyone believe they were *still* there. 'Late at night, hidden behind black masks and wrapped up in huge capes, the two brothers let themselves down into a deserted alley by means of a rope ladder.' "

The teacher nodded several times, his head on one side, as if half approving. After several seconds of silence he said, "Good. Now give a resumé of the rest of the story for those students who have not understood it."

The child looked toward the window. Then he lowered his eyes to the book, immediately lifting them again in the direction of the rostrum. "Where should I begin, sir?"

"Begin at the beginning of the chapter."

Without sitting down again, the child turned the pages of his book, and after a short silence began to tell the story of the conspiracy of Phillip of Coburg. In spite of frequent hesitations and repetitions, he managed to make it a more or less coherent account, though he accorded far too much importance to secondary facts and, on the other hand, scarcely mentioned certain events of vital significance—sometimes omitting them altogether. Since the child continually emphasized actions themselves rather than their political causes, an uninformed listener would have had considerable difficulty unraveling the meaning of the story and the links that connected the actions thus described with each other as well as with the various characters involved. The teacher gradually shifted his attention toward the windows. The high-school student was standing under the lowest branch again; he had set his satchel at the foot of the tree, and was jumping up from where he stood, one arm raised. When he saw that all his efforts were in vain, he stood perfectly still once more, contemplating the inaccessible leaves. Phillip of Coburg and his mercenaries were encamped on the banks of the Neckar. The students, who no longer had to follow the printed text, had all lifted their heads again and were silently considering the paper jumping-jack on the wall. It had neither hands nor feet, merely four crudely indicated limbs and a round head, too fat for its body, to which a string was attached. Three inches higher, at the other end of the string, was a rough pellet of blotting paper which held it on the wall.

But the narrator had lost himself in a series of minor complications, and at last the teacher interrupted him. "That's fine," he said, "we know quite enough as it is. Sit down and continue reading at the top of the page: 'But Phillip and his partisans . . .'"

All the students leaned over their desks at the same moment, and the new reader began, his voice as inexpressive as

his predecessor's, although conscientiouly stressing all commas and periods. "'But Phillip and his partisans did not choose to interpret the matter in this fashion. If the majority of the members of the Diet—or even the party of the barons alone— renounced the privileges that had been granted, to him as well as to themselves, in return for the inestimable support they had provided the archducal cause at the time of the revolt, neither he nor they, in the future, would ever again be able to demand that any man they accused be arraigned or deprived of his seignorial rights without benefit of trial. It was essential that these negotiations, which appeared to him to be undertaken in a manner so prejudicial to his cause, be interrupted at any cost before the fateful date. That evening, Joseph de Hagen, one of Phillip's lieutenants, presented himself at the archbishop's palace, supposedly as an act of courtesy. As we have said above, the two brothers were there already . . .'"

The heads remained dutifully bowed over the desks. The teacher turned his eyes toward the window. The student was leaning against the tree again, absorbed in his inspection of the bark. He leaned down very slowly, lower and lower, as if he were tracing a line drawn on the trunk—on the side of the tree not visible from the schoolroom windows. At about four feet from the ground he stopped moving and leaned his head to one side, in precisely the same position that he had assumed before. One by one, in the classroom, the heads rose from their desks.

The children looked at the teacher, then at the windows. But the lower panes were of ground glass, and through the upper ones they could see only treetops and the sky. Not a single bee or butterfly could be seen against the glass. Soon every pair of eyes was contemplating once again the white paper jumping-jack.

3. The Wrong Direction

Rain water has accumulated in the bottom of a shallow

depression, forming among the trees a great pool roughly circular in shape and about thirty feet across. The soil is black around the edges of the pool, without showing the slightest trace of vegetation between the straight, tall trunks. In this part of the forest there are no thickets, no underbrush of any kind. The ground is covered instead by an even layer of felt, composed of twigs and leaves crumbled to veiny skeletons upon which, here and there, a few patches of half-rotten moss are barely discernible. High above the boles the bare branches stand out sharply against the sky.

The water is quite tranparent, although brownish in color. Tiny fragments that have fallen from the trees—twigs, empty pods, strips of bark—accumulate at the bottom and steep there all winter long. But nothing is floating on the water, nothing breaks the uniformly polished surface. There is not the slightest breath of wind to disturb its perfection.

The weather has cleared. The day is drawing to its close. The sun is low on the left, behind the tree trunks. Its weakly slanting rays describe a few narrow, luminous stripes across the surface of the pool, alternating with wider bands of shadow.

Parallel to these stripes, a row of huge trees stands at the edge of the water on the opposite bank; perfectly cylindrical, without any low branches, they extend themselves downward to meet their reflections which are far more vivid than the trunks themselves; by contrast the trees seem almost indistinct, perhaps even blurred. In the black water the symmetrical boles gleam as if they were varnished, and on the sides facing the setting sun a last touch of light confirms their contours.

However, this admirable landscape is not only upside down, but discontinuous as well. The rays of the sun that cross-hatch the mirror-like surface interrupt the reflection at regular intervals perpendicular to the trunks; one's vision is obscured by the very intensity of the light which reveals innumerable particles suspended in the upper layer of the water. It is

only in the zones of shadow, where these tiny particles are invisible, that the brilliance of the reflection can now be remarked. Thus each trunk is interrupted at apparently equal intervals by a series of uncertain rings (something like the rings on the trees themselves), so that this whole forest "in depth" has the appearance of a checkerboard.

Within reach of one's hand, near the southern bank, the branches of the reflection overlap some old, sunken leaves, rust-colored but still whole, whose perfect outlines contrast sharply with the background of mud—they are oak leaves.

Someone walking noiselessly on this carpet of humus has appeared at the right, heading for the water. He walks to the edge and stops. The sun is in his eyes and he has to step to one side to be able to make out anything at all.

Then he sees the striped surface of the pool. But from where he is standing the reflection of the trunks coincides with their shadows—partially at least, for the trees in front of him are not perfectly straight. The light in his eyes keeps him from seeing anything clearly, and there are certainly no oak leaves at his feet.

This was the place toward which he was walking. Or has he just discovered that he came the wrong way? Afer a few uncertain glances around him, he turns back toward the east, walking through the woods as silently as before along the path by which he had come.

The place is deserted again. The sun is still at the same height on the left; the light has not changed. Across the pool, the sleek, straight boles are reflected in the unrippled water, perpendicular to the rays of the setting sun.

At the bottom of the bands of darkness gleam the truncated reflections of the columns—upside down and black, miraculously washed.

—Translated by Richard Howard

Parachutes, My Love, Could Carry Us Higher

I just said I didn't know
And now you are holding me
In your arms,
How kind.
Parachutes, my love, could carry us higher.
Yet around the net I am floating
Pink and pale blue fish are caught in it,
They are beautiful,
But they are not good for eating.
Parachutes, my love, could carry us higher
Than this mid-air in which we tremble,
Having exercised our arms in swimming,
Now the suspension, you say,
Is exquisite. I do not know.
There is coral below the surface,
There is sand, and berries
Like pomegranates grow.
This wide net, I am treading water
Near it, bubbles are rising and salt
Drying on my lashes, yet I am no nearer
Air than water. I am closer to you
Than land and I am in a stranger ocean
Than I wished.

In America, the Seasons . . .

You in the new winter
stretch forth your hands

they are needles,
the sun quivers,

the landsman translates
epine.

False starter,
regretter of seasons,

you are tomahawking
summer
and
I incline toward you
like dead Europe
wrapped in loose arms.

Yet on this plain
who would hesitate?

seeing the funeral of grass
the thin afternoon
plundering the rocks,
the broken leaves

and silence incontinently snapped.

Who hears Piers calling now?

It is the face
under the blanket
we watch.

Safe Flights

To no longer like the taste of whisky
This is saying also no to you who are
A goldfinch in the breeze,
To no longer wish winter to have explanations
To lace your shoes in the snow
With no need to remember,
To no longer pull the two blankets
Over your shoulders, to no longer feel the cold,
To no longer pretend in the flower
There is a secret, or in the earth a tomb,
And no longer water on stone hurting the ear,
Making those five noises of thunder
And you tremble no longer,
To no longer travel over mountains,
Over small farms
No longer the weather changing and the atmosphere
Causing delicate breaks where the nerves confuse,
To no longer have your name shouted
And your birthmark again described,
To no longer fear where the rapids break
A miniature rock under your canoe,
To no longer repeat the mirror is water,
The house is a burden to the weak cyclone,
You are under a tent where promises perform
And the ring you grasp as an aerialist
Glides, no longer.

One afternoon the municipal architect and I went to see the wealthy residential district: a suburb of white houses surrounded by gardens full of flowers and wide streets lined with trees. Shiny new cars stood before the entrances, the paths, and the gardens. Bright sunlight flooded down from a blue sky. I took off my topcoat and carried it over my arm.

"In this part of town," my companion said to me, "the weather is always fine. The land commands a high price, and the villas are constructed of the best materials; only well-to-do people, the cheerful, the healthy, the likable, live here."

"So I see. Here," I pointed out, "the trees are already in leaf and the light is filtered, but not so much as to shade the façades of the houses, while in all the rest of the city the sky is as gray as an old woman's hair, frozen snow still clings to the edges of the sidewalks, and the wind blows cold. This morning it was freezing when I got up. How curious it is to find ourselves in the midst of spring here, as though we had suddenly been transported a thousand miles to the south. When you take a plane, you often have the feeling that you are witnessing the transfiguration of the world. And yet you'd have to go to the airfield and fly for at least two hours in order to see the landscape metamorphose itself into the Riviera, for instance. But here, we've done no more than take a short streetcar ride, and the trip, if you can even call it a trip, took place in the same places, if you'll permit me this little play on words, which, moreover, is unintentional, I assure you," I said with a smile which was both witty and constrained. "How do you account for it? Is this district more sheltered? But I don't see any hills around to protect it from bad weather? In any case, as everyone knows, hills don't turn away the clouds, nor do they protect us from the rain. Are there bright, warm currents of air coming from below or above? But if

that were the case, surely we'd have heard of it. There's no wind, although the air smells fresh. It's very curious."

"It's an island, quite simply," the municipal architect replied, "an oasis, just as sometimes in the desert you see astonishing cities rise up in the midst of arid sand, covered with fresh roses and surrounded with fountains and rivers."

"Ah, yes, that's right. You mean the kind of cities we call 'mirages'!" I said, to show that I was not completely ignorant.

At that time we were strolling alongside a park which I noticed had a pool in its center. We walked for almost a mile and a half through the villas, private residences, gardens and flowers. The calm weather was perfect; relaxing—too much so, perhaps. It began to be disturbing.

"Why don't we see anyone in the streets?" I asked. "We're the only strollers out. No doubt it's the hour for lunch and all the people are at home. But why don't we hear laughter and the clinking of glasses? There's not a sound. All the windows seem to be closed!"

We had stopped before two buildings that appeared to have been abandoned before they were finished. There they stood half erected, white in the midst of the greenery, waiting for the builders.

"It is so pleasant here!" I said. "If I were rich—alas, I earn but little—I'd buy one of these lots. In a few days the house would be built and I'd no longer have to live among the unhappy, in that dirty suburb, on those factory streets darkened by winter, dust, or mud. Here, the air smells so good," I said, inhaling the soft yet potent air which intoxicated my lungs.

My companion knit his brows: "The police have suspended all construction in this area. It was a pointless regulation, for no one is buying these lots today, anyway. The residents of the district even want to move out. But they have no other place to live. If it weren't for that, they'd have all packed their bags by now. Perhaps with them it's also a point of

honor not to flee. They prefer to remain hidden in their beautiful homes. They don't go out except in case of extreme necessity, and then in groups of ten or fifteen. Even so, there is still danger."

"You're joking! Why are you putting on this serious air? You're darkening the day; do you want to discourage me?"

"I'm not joking, I assure you."

I felt a sudden pain in my heart. Everything clouded over for me. The resplendent landscape, in which I had taken root, which had, all at once, become part of me or of which I had become part, detached itself, became completely exterior to me, was no longer anything but a landscape in a frame, an inanimate object. I felt myself alone, outside of everything, lost in a dead clarity.

"Explain yourself!" I implored. I who had looked forward to a pleasant outing! "I was so happy a few moments ago!"

We were retracing our steps, as it happened, towards the pool.

"This is the place," the municipal architect said. "Right here is where they find two or three drowned, every day."

"Drowned?"

"Come and see for yourself that I'm not exaggerating."

I followed him. From the edge of the pool, I could see that there was, in fact, the swollen corpse of an officer in the engineering corps, floating in the water, as well as that of a little boy of five or six years, rolled up inside his hoop, and still holding his rod in his clenched hand.

"There are three today," my guide murmured. "There's another," he pointed with his finger.

A red head, that I had taken, for a moment, to be aquatic vegetation, emerged from the depths, but remained caught beneath the marble rim of the pool.

"How horrible! It's a woman, I believe."

"Apparently," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "The other is a man, and there's a child. That's all we know."

"Maybe she's the mother of the little one. . . . How sad! Who did this?"

"The murderer. It's always the same person. They can't catch him."

"But our life is in danger. Let's get out of here," I cried.

"As long as you're with me you're not in danger. I am the muncipal architect, a city functionary; and he doesn't attack the administration. When I retire, it will be a different matter, of course, but, for the present . . ."

"Let's get away from here, anyway," I said.

We walked away at a fast clip. I was in a hurry to leave the wealthy residential district. The rich are not always happy, I thought, experiencing an indescribable distress. I suddenly felt dead tired, sick at heart, that existence was in vain. "What good is anything," I said to myself, "if this is what we end up with?"

"You surely expect that he'll be apprehended before your retirement begins?" I asked.

"That's not so easy! . . . You must know that we are doing everything we can . . ." he replied with a mournful air. Then he added: "Not that way, we'll lose our direction, we'll keep going around and around in circles . . ."

"Show me the way. . . . Ah! the day began so well. But now, I will always see those drowned people, that image will never leave my memory!"

"I should not have let you see them . . ."

"It can't be helped; it is better to know everything, better to know everything."

In a few moments we had reached a way out of the district, at the end of a drive on the edge of the outer boulevard and across from the streetcar stop. Some people were standing there, waiting. The sky was somber. I was cold, frozen. I put on my topcoat and wrapped my scarf around my neck. Thin rain was falling, water mixed with snow, and the pavement was wet.

"You don't have to go home right away, do you?" the commissioner asked me (that is how I learned that he was also a commissioner). "Surely you have time for a drink with me . . ."

The commissioner seemed to have regained his cheerfulness. Not I.

"There's a bar over there, near the streetcar stop, just a step from the cemetery; they sell wreaths there too."

"I don't feel very thirsty now, you know . . ."

"Don't worry about it. If one dwells on all the misfortunes of humanity, one cannot go on living. Every day children are massacred, old people starve, the widows, the orphans, the dying."

"Yes, Mr. Commissioner, but having seen this close up, seen it with my own eyes . . . I cannot remain unconcerned."

"You are too impressionable," my companion replied, giving me a hearty slap on the shoulder.

We entered the bar.

"We're going to try to cheer you up! . . . Two beers!" he ordered.

We sat down near the window. The stout proprietor, wearing a vest and with his rolled-up shirt sleeves exposing his enormous hairy arms, came to serve us:

"For you, I have real beer!"

I started to pay him.

"No, no," said the commissioner, "it's on me!"

I was still heavy-hearted.

"If only you had his description!" I said.

"But we do have it. At least the one under which he operates. His portrait is posted all over the city."

"How did you get it?"

"From the drowned. Some of his victims, in their final agony, have regained consciousness for a moment and have been able to give us additional details. We also know how

he goes about his game. As a matter of fact everybody in the district knows."

"But then why aren't they more prudent? All they have to do is to be on their guard."

"It's not so simple as all that. I tell you, every evening there are always two or three who fall into his trap. But he, he never lets himself get caught."

"I still can't understand."

I was astonished to perceive that this appeared to amuse the architect.

"Look," he said, "over there at the streetcar stop is where he makes his attack. When the passengers get off, on their way home, he goes up to them, disguised as a beggar. He whines, begs for money, tries to work on their pity. That's his usual dodge. He'll say that he's just been discharged from the hospital, has no job but is looking for one, has nowhere to spend the night. But that's only the opening. He singles out a kindly soul. He engages her in conversation, hooks onto her, doesn't let go for a moment. He offers to sell her various small objects that he takes out of his basket: artificial flowers, scissors, obscene pictures, all kinds of things. Generally, his offers are refused, the good soul is in a hurry, she hasn't got time. Spieling all the while, he moves along with her until they're near the pool that you saw. Then, all of a sudden, he pulls his master stroke: he offers to show her the photograph of the colonel. It's irresistible. Since there's no longer much light, the good soul bends over in order to see it better. At that moment she is lost. Seizing his chance while she is looking at the photograph, he pushes her and she falls into the pool. She drowns. The deed is done. All he has to do is to look for a new victim."

"What's so amazing is that they recognize him and yet they let him surprise them."

"It's a trap, that's what it is. He's crafty. He's never been caught in the act."

Mechanically, I looked through the window at the people descending from the streetcar, which had just arrived. I didn't see any beggar.

"You won't see him," the commissioner said, divining my thought. "He won't show himself, for he knows that we are here."

"Perhaps you ought to post a plain-clothes man on permanent duty at this place."

"That's not possible. Our inspectors are snowed under with work, they have other duties to perform. Moreover, they too would want to see the photograph of the colonel. Five of them have already been drowned in just that way. Ah! if we only had some evidence, we wouldn't have any trouble finding him!"

I parted company with my companion, not without having thanked him for being kind enough to take me to see the wealthy residential district, and also for so amiably permitting himself to be interviewed on the subject of all these unpardonable crimes. Alas, his instructive revelations will never appear in any newspaper: I am not a journalist, nor have I ever claimed to be one. The information of the architect-commissioner had been given to me entirely gratuitously. And it had filled me with anguish, gratuitously. Overcome with an indefinable malaise, I regained my house.

Edouard was waiting for me in the low-ceilinged, gloomy, autumnal sitting room (the electricity doesn't work during the day). There he was, seated on the chest near the window, dressed in black, very thin, his face pale and sad, his eyes burning. Presumably he still had a touch of fever. He noticed that I was distraught and asked me the reason. When I began to tell him of my experiences, he stopped me at the first words; he knew the whole story, he said, in a trembling, almost childish voice, and he was even surprised that I myself had not heard of it long before this. The whole city knew about it. That was why he had never spoken of it to me. It

was something that everyone had talked about for a long time and now that it was old news it had been assimilated. But regrettable, certainly.

"Very regrettable!" I said.

In my turn, I did not conceal my surprise that he was not more disturbed. But perhaps I was unjust, perhaps his thoughts were on the disease that was consuming him, for he was tubercular. One can never hope to know the heart of another.

"Would you like to go for a little stroll?" he asked. "I've been waiting for you for a whole hour, and I'm freezing here in your house. Surely it must be warmer outside."

Although I was depressed and exhausted (I'd much rather have gone to bed), I agreed to go with him.

He got up and put on his felt hat with its black ribbon, and his dark-gray topcoat; then he lifted up his heavy, bulging briefcase, but let it fall before he had taken a step. It fell open as it hit the floor. We both bent down, at the same time. From one of the pockets of the briefcase some photographs had slipped out; they showed a colonel in full-dress uniform, mustachioed—an ordinary colonel with a good, even rather striking head. We placed the briefcase on the table to look through it more easily; we took out several hundred more photographs, all of the same subject.

"What does this mean?" I demanded. "This is the photograph, the famous photograph of the colonel! You had it here and you never told me a word about it!"

"I don't keep looking in my briefcase all the time," he replied.

"Still, it's your briefcase, and you always carry it with you!"

"That's not a reason."

"Anyway, let's make use of the opportunity while we can, let's look further."

He plunged his white, sick man's hand, with its crooked fingers, into the other pockets of the enormous black brief-

case. Then he drew out (how was it able to contain so much?) incredible quantities of artificial flowers, of obscene pictures, of candies, of toy banks, of children's watches, of brooches, fountain pens, cardboard boxes, of I don't know what all—a hundred objects and some cigarettes. ("Those belong to me," he said.) The table was filled to overflowing.

"These are the things the monster uses!" I cried. "And you had them there!"

"I was unaware of it."

"Empty it all out," I encouraged him. "Go ahead!"

He went on taking out more things. There were calling cards with the name and the address of the criminal, his card of identity complete with photograph, and then, in a little case, some slips of paper on which were written the names of all the victims, and an intimate diary that we leafed through, with all its revealing details, his projects, his plan of action minutely described, his declaration of faith, his doctrine.

"You've got all the evidence right here. We can have him arrested."

"I didn't know," he mumbled, "I didn't know . . ."

"You could have saved so many human lives," I reproached him.

"I feel embarrassed. I didn't know. I never know what I have, I'm not in the habit of looking in my briefcase."

"It's a condemnable negligence!" I said.

"I apologize. I'm very sorry."

"And really, Edouard, these things couldn't have got into your briefcase all by themselves. Either you've found them or you've received them!"

I felt pity for him. He had flushed red, he was truly ashamed.

He made an attempt to remember.

"Ah, yes!" he cried after several seconds. " I recall it now. The criminal sent me his private diary, his notes, his lists, a long time ago, begging me to publish them in a literary review —that was long before he carried out the murders and I had

completly forgotten all about it. At the time it never occurred to me that he would perpetrate them; it was only later that he must have decided to carry out his plans; as for me, I regarded all this as so much daydreaming, without any relation to reality, a sort of science fiction. Now, of course, I regret that I did not carefully consider the matter, that I did not associate his papers with subsequent events."

"In any case the relationship is between intention and realization, neither more or less; it's as clear as the light of day."

From the briefcase he also took out a large envelope that we opened; it contained a map, a very detailed map carefully marked to show all the places where the assassin had been encountered and it gave his exact schedule, minute by minute.

"It's simple," I said. "We'll notify the police, and all they have to do is nab him. Let's hurry, the office of the prefecture closes before nightfall. If we're late, there'll be no one there. And by tomorrow he may have changed his schedule. Let's go to the architect and show him the evidence."

"All right," said Edouard, rather indifferently.

We left on the run. In the hallway, we bumped into the concierge, who cried, "What do you mean by . . ." The rest of her sentence was lost in the wind.

By the time we had reached the main avenue we were winded and had to slow down. To the right, ploughed fields extended as far as the eye could see. To the left were the first buildings of the city. And straight ahead of us, the setting sun was purpling the sky. Some bare trees straggled along both sides of the avenue. Only a few people were out.

We followed along the rails of the streetcar tracks (had it already stopped running?) which extended far into the distance.

Three or four large military trucks (I don't know where they came from) suddenly blocked our way. They were parked along the sidewalk, which, at this point, lay beneath the level

of the roadway, which seemed, because of this difference of level, to be raised.

It was fortunate that Edouard and I had to pause to catch our breath, for I suddenly noticed that my friend did not have his briefcase with him.

"What have you done with it? Here I assumed that you were carrying it with you." I said. The scatterbrain! In our hurry he had left it in the house. "There's no point in going to see the commissioner without our evidence! What were you thinking of? You're incomprehensible. Go back quickly and look for it. I'll run on so that I can at least warn the commissioner in time and get him to wait. Hurry back to the house and try to rejoin me as soon as possible. The prefecture is at the end of the street. I don't like being alone on an errand like this: it's unnerving, you understand."

Edouard disappeared. I began to experience a sensation of fear. Here the sidewalk descended even lower, so much so that some steps should have been built, four to be exact, so that pedestrians might have access to the roadway. By now I was very close to one of the big trucks in the center of the line (the others were ahead and behind). This was an open truck, with rows of benches on which were sitting, pressed tightly together, forty young soldiers in dark-colored uniforms. One of them held a big bouquet of red carnations in his hand. He was using it as a fan.

Several policemen came up to direct the traffic, loudly blowing their whistles. I was grateful for their help: the traffic jam was holding me up. These policemen were unusually tall. One of them, who was standing near a tree, looked taller than the tree itself when he raised his night stick.

Then I saw a small, modestly dressed gentleman with white hair, hat in hand, standing before the policeman whose great height made him appear even smaller; he was asking him very politely, perhaps too politely, but with real humility for some small item of information. Without interrupting his sig-

naling, the policeman, in a rough voice, replied abruptly to the retiring gentleman (who might perfectly well have been his father, given the difference in age, but excluding the difference in stature, which did not favor the old man). The policeman sent him on his way with a rude word, turning back to continue his work and blowing his whistle.

The policeman's attitude shocked me. In any case it was his *duty* to be polite to the public—surely that was incorporated in the regulations. 'When I see his chief, the architect, I will try to remember to speak to him about this!' I said to myself. As for us, we are all too polite, too timid with the police; we've encouraged them in their bad habits and it's basically our fault.

A second policeman, as huge as the first, came over and stood near me on the sidewalk. He was visibly annoyed by the traffic jam, about which, it must be admitted, he had every right to be annoyed. Having no need of steps to mount up from the sidewalk to the roadway, he approached very near the truck full of soldiers. Although his feet were on a level with mine, his head was somewhat higher than their heads. Accusing them of tying up the traffic, he harshly reprimanded the soldiers, who were scarcely to blame, least of all the young man with the bouquet of red carnations.

"You've nothing to do but amuse yourself with this?" he asked him.

"I'm not doing anything wrong, Mr. Policeman," replied the soldier very gently, in a timid voice. "This isn't holding up the truck."

"Insolence, it's jamming the motor!" cried the policeman, slapping the soldier, who didn't say a word. Then the policeman grabbed the flowers and threw them away; they disappeared.

I was personally outraged by this behavior. I firmly believe that there is no hope for a country where the police have the upper hand over the army.

"Why are you meddling in this? Is it any of your business?" he said, turning towards me.

In no wise had I expressed my thoughts aloud. They must have been easy to divine.

"In the first place, what are you doing here?"

I seized upon his question as an excuse to explain my case, possibly to ask his advice, even his assistance.

"I have all the evidence," I said, "and now the murderer can be arrested. I must hurry on to the prefecture. It's not very far from here. Can you go there with me? I'm a friend of the commissioner, of the architect."

"That's not my branch. I'm in traffic control."

"Yes, but . . ."

"That's not part of my job, don't you understand! Your story doesn't interest me. Since you're connected with the chief, go on and see him and get the hell out of here. You know the way, get going, nothing's stopping you."

"All right, Mr. Policeman," I said, as politely as the soldier, but in spite of myself: "Very well, Mr. Policeman!"

The policeman turned to his colleague who was standing beside the tree and said with harsh irony: "Let the gentleman pass!"

This man, whose face I could see through the branches, gave me the signal to advance. As I passed near him, he screamed at me in a rage, "I hate you!" Though surely it was I who had more of a right to say that than he.

I found myself alone in the center of the road, the trucks already far behind me. Onward I hurried, straight towards the prefecture. Night was fast approaching, the north wind was freezing, and I was worried. Would Edouard be able to rejoin me in time? And I was furious with the police: these people are good for nothing but to annoy us, to teach us good manners, but when we have a real need for them, when it is a question of defending us—then it's a case of 'tell it to the Marines'—they let us down every time!

On my left there were no more houses. Only gray fields on both sides of the road. There seemed to be no end to this route, or this avenue, with its streetcar rails. I walked and walked: 'If only he's not too late, if only he's not too late!' I thought to myself.

Abruptly, he surged up in front of me. There could be no doubt of it: it was the murderer; and all about us there was only the darkened plain. The wind was wrapping an old sheet of newspaper around the trunk of a gaunt tree. Behind the man, at a distance of several hundred yards, I could see in profile, against the setting sun, the prefecture office buildings, not far from the stop where the streetcar had just arrived; I could see some people descending—they seemed very small at that distance. No help was possible, they were much too far away, they would not be able to hear me.

I stopped short, frozen in my tracks. 'These lousy cops,' I thought, 'they've left me alone with him on purpose. They want people to think that it was only a private quarrel!'

We were face to face, but two steps from each other. I looked at him in silence, on my guard. He stared at me and he was almost laughing.

He was a man of middle age, skinny, stunted, very short of stature, and ill-shaven; he appeared to be weaker than I. He was wearing a dirty, worn gabardine coat, torn at the pockets, and some of his toes were sticking out of the gaps in his broken-down shoes. He had a dilapidated, almost shapeless hat on his head; he kept one hand in his pocket, while with the other he clenched a knife with a large blade that reflected a livid gleam. He fixed me with his single cold eye, made of the same material and glittering with the same light which was reflected from his weapon.

Never had I seen an expression so cruel, of such hardness—and why?—of such ferocity. An implacable eye, that of a snake, perhaps, or of a tiger, a heedless murderer's. No word, friendly or authoritative, no reasoning would be able to per-

suade him; no promise of happiness, not all the love in the world would be able to touch him; nor could beauty cause him to give way, nor irony shame him, nor all the sages of the world succeed in making him comprehend the vanity of crime, which is as vain as charity.

The tears of the saints might fall on this lidless eye, on this steely look, without softening it in the least; battalions of Christs could have followed one another to their Calvaries for him in vain.

Slowly I drew from my pockets my two pistols, and in silence, for two seconds, held them aimed at him. He did not flinch. I lowered them, let my arms fall. I felt myself disarmed, desperate: what could bullets—any more than my feeble strength—do against the cold hate and obstinacy, against the infinite energy of this absolute cruelty, without reason and without mercy?

—Translated by Stanley Read

GARY SNYDER: Letter from Kyoto

"You know, we got nothing to worry about," Will Petersen said, four of us walking off toward a Chinese-dumpling shop in the middle of town, "they got a General buried up on the hill that lived 300 years & Mt. Hiei in the northeast to keep out the bad influences"—not much to worry about, Kyoto town laid out crisscross square like old Ch'ang-an, with big green hills on three sides, logged off in arty cubist patchwork, & a couple of trout streams running through, without trout and called rivers. A town about the size of Portland Oregon, never been bombed, blocky wood houses, granite-edged narrow dirt streets & chunky slant gray all-levels tile roof everywhere, picking up light from all angles & plenty of pines. Downtown like any town but funnier, full of taxis and long strings of student-girls in sailor suits, from provinces, school tours, & clumpy country grandmothers too, seeing sights. Mingling with zones of dinky bars & coffee-houses that look like Stratford-on-Avon outside & Christina Rossetti's parlor inside (western influence)—but what they come to see is old Japan shrines & temples, Kyoto has thousands of them. Even though many people don't take Kyoto very seriously any more. A friend in Tokyo said if you go to somebody's house in Kyoto they'll tell you the toothpick you get was handmade in a hereditary factory 500 years old. Everyone except the bargirls seem to have been doing their line of work for nine generations.

Not many white men, but those here all hooked on the place & all for different reasons. Petersen (a painter from Berkeley) lives in a Girl's College & has discovered Baseball, these little 18-year-olds that look 12 snag flies & do push-ups all day under his window. Lindley Hubbell, the poet, is hung on *Nô* & never misses a performance, won't talk to anybody while it goes and goes, five hours isolating & focusing pivots of love or anger or remorse, flute drum dance & chant, until

they are completely for once seen. Burton Watson knows trails to hidden temples scattered from Kyoto to Nara, and works at translating ancient Chinese histories, using Japanese scholarship, into English. Phil Yampolsky, also historian, can't speak anything but Kyoto dialect and a low variety of that, he thaws the stoniest old types with some American-unheard-of sudden slang. Walter Nowick teaches piano for a living and has gotten up before dawn every morning for seven years to go & present an answer to his elderly Zen master.

Some fine Kyoto people too. A modern sculptor named Tsuji, about fifty, lives with wife & daughters in a tiny house full of South-Sea masks & mad Africans & half-worm-devoured Sutra books—he told of a recently discovered Buddhist priest of about two centuries back named Mokujiki, "Wood-Eater"—a happy old man who made one big wooden statue every day for a year chips flying, splintery sages a pleasure to see against the bland smooth gold-leaf style of that time. Up on Mt. Hiei, in a deep grove of cryptomeria, misty & creaking with frogs, a dark sweet-smelling old temple, there's a young monk who used to be a student of political economy—now reading volumes of Tendai philosophy, although the last time I saw him he was relaxing with the autobiography of Charles Darwin in English. He took a vow not to leave the mountain for twelve years. And down here in the city, hordes of young ones studying English literature. Girls who wrote papers on Shelley. Girls writing theses on *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Less lofty girls who study *Vogue* and sew their clothes accordingly. Numbers of cynical slouchy university boys in the universal black uniform with high collar & gold captain's buttons scraping along in worn-down clogs. They're all poor—most students live on about $20 a month—but the English-language bookstores have things like Grierson's Donne, the Shakespeare Variorums, countless Graham Greenes, Pounds & Faulkners. Some of these students dig old Japan too; most not. If they'd go down to Nara, back in time,

to Horyuji temple & look at the dozens of really ancient statues, carved wood little waked-up cats with gone looks & secret hipster smiles, they mightn't feel so left out.

Some of the Zen people seem to swing in both realms, but Zen the organization has little attraction for this generation. It tricked too long for the Government & got too rich and mean. The founder of Daitoku temple, Daito, lived under a Kyoto bridge for thirty years, five centuries back. Nowadays they all have nice temples of their own. Still, inside & beyond all that, to sit in a meditation-hall is to make all possible scenes in this saha-world at once.

I hardened my heart against cherry blossoms, before I came, thinking not to be fooled by travel-posters. But now winter is over, people are warming up—not huddled and bundled all day in icy rooms—& the cherry trees are blooming & everybody getting drunk and laughing and goofing in the parks (remnant of ancient fertility-rite says Marcel Grannet), the little kids playing bare-legged again. It's too much. So we went out last night to eat Chinese dumplings and drink saké. One, a tall Frenchman named Chenaille with a black beard who lives in a country monastery—in town on vacation—& in a little saké joint the waitress pointed at him and squealed, "A lecherous missionary!" (childhood pictures of sturdy Victorian hands with hairy faces who came and built churches)—but no, we said, he came to do Zen. Some sort of circle gone full turn.

GEORGES ARNAUD: Sweet Confessions*

The Characters:

LEHIDEUX, *police inspector*
MICHAUD, *police inspector*
JEAN DUBREUIL, *the groom*
SIMONE, *the bride*
A CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
A GUARD

[*The set represents an office in a city hall. A table with a green cover, three chairs, a filing cabinet. Upstage, a door leads into the office of the deputy mayor. Stage right, another door leads into the marriage bureau. When the curtain rises, two police inspectors are coming out of the deputy's office.*]

LEHIDEUX: Just right for a love-nest. You're sure he won't skip out the window?

MICHAUD: There's a cop on duty outside.

LEHIDEUX: The deputy has a sofa in his office. Do you suppose he knew this kind of case would come up?

MICHAUD: With a job like his—all those people asking for favors—well, it's better that way than on the corner of a table. You remember that dame from Villeneuve we had on an abortion rap?

[*They laugh.*]

LEHIDEUX: They'll be out any minute now.

MICHAUD: Just a second. I'll go see how they're coming along.

[*He opens the door stage right. We hear the mayor's voice.*]

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MAYOR'S VOICE: "For better or for worse, in sickness and in health . . ."

MICHAUD: What a nasty sense of humor that mayor's got! He's taking his own sweet time. At the rate he's going, it'll take another quarter of an hour.

LEHIDEUX: So the lad will have his surprise in twenty minutes. Because, you know, he isn't the least bit prepared for our little condition.

MICHAUD: You've talked to him?

LEHIDEUX: No. The guards told me. It was the first thing he asked them this morning when they brought him out of his cell.

MICHAUD: You mean if he'd get a chance to be alone with her, after the ceremony?

LEHIDEUX: About that. Actually, what he said was, "Will they let us have a shot?" The chief had given instructions. They told him, "That usually happens when prisoners get married."

MICHAUD: Ah, that's perfect. Not too much, but enough. This way, he's sure he's got it made.

LEHIDEUX: If we had tried to make a deal first, we wouldn't have stood half a chance. We'd have said, "Tell us who your accomplices were and we'll give you an hour with your wife." He would have had time to think it over, to start getting stubborn.

MICHAUD: Whereas now the idea is probably running through his head like a movie. In his mind he's already doing it. And then, bang! Just when he's ready to—

LEHIDEUX: Not a chance he'll refuse. He won't be able to tell everything fast enough.

MICHAUD: Getting right down to brass tacks.

LEHIDEUX: Like painless childbirth. Just think, he must be horny as all hell. How long is it that he's been in?

MICHAUD: Fourteen months. He must be boiling over. Fourteen months without a woman. . . . And now he has one in

his hands—and a real doll, too—who's just begging for it. . . . It's all well and good to talk about not squealing on your buddies—but whose conscience would hold out against that?

LEHIDEUX: His pals won't even be able to hold it against him. Do you know, we're actually making things very easy for him.

MICHAUD: We're sparing him from having any regrets. That's what I call being considerate.

LEHIDEUX: I only hope it will pay off. After getting nowhere for so long, it would do me good to bring off a little something for a change.

MICHAUD: It wouldn't do either of us any harm. Because the chief sent both of us, remember. [*Pause.*] But what the hell, there isn't even a typewriter. If there's a statement to take down, it'll have to be by hand. Christ!

LEHIDEUX: There's a portable in the filing cabinet. That's part of the surprise element. Seeing it on the table would get him back in the atmosphere too soon.

MICHAUD: You understand how we're going about it, don't you? To begin with, I'll be nice and you'll be tough. We'll let him walk into it, and then we'll see.

LEHIDEUX: O.K. But what is that ass of a mayor up to?

MICHAUD: And you gripe about getting bad reports! Talking like that isn't going to get you a promotion. [*Pause. He goes to the door stage right.*] Besides . . . [*He opens the door.*] It's over now, I think.

JEAN'S VOICE: Yes.

MAYOR'S VOICE: By virtue of the power invested in me by the state, I now declare you united by the holy bonds of matrimony. [*Pause.*] Jean Dubreuil, I hope that, by regarding the life you have led up to now as a closed chapter, you will manage to make yourself worthy of the mark of affection you have received today from your wife. And for you, madame, I hope that your husband will be released by the

authorities before too long a wait on your part.

MICHAUD: Small chance.

LEHIDEUX: About twenty years. Hardly worth mentioning. [*A little shuffling about in the marriage bureau. Clicking of the guards' heels as they come to attention to salute the mayor.*]

MAYOR'S VOICE: See that the small room and the deputy's office are free at three o'clock.

VOICES OF THE TWO GUARDS: Yes, sir. [*To Simone*:] This way, madame. [*To Jean*:] This way. [*Clanking of handcuffs.*]

[*Simone enters first, followed by the captain of the guard, who is leading Jean by the wrist. His other wrist is handcuffed to a guard's.*]

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD: Here is the prisoner.

MICHAUD: Fine. Thank you. You can release him. Step into the other room. We'll call you in a little while.

GUARDS [*saluting*]: Madame. [*They exit.*]

MICHAUD [*to Jean*]: So here you are. How have you been since the last time I saw you? [*To Lehideux*:] Dubreuil and I know each other. I was the one who arrested him, when I was on guard duty at Béziers.

LEHIDEUX: Oh.

MICHAUD: Well, then. Congratulations are in order. [*To Simone*:] And you, too, madame. Your husband has better luck than he deserves. Don't you agree, Lehideux?

LEHIDEUX: I'll say! In fact . . .

MICHAUD: Come on, now. Don't be like that. When it's a question of love. . . . Well, you know. You love him, madame?

SIMONE [*after hesitating for a moment in astonishment, confesses with a smile, but also with conviction*]: Yes.

MICHAUD: Well, then, Dubreuil. So now you're married. No one can say you haven't been lucky. Such a pretty little wife. . . .

LEHIDEUX: Didn't he abandon her, at one point? [*Jean and Simone start.*]

MICHAUD: Let's have no more about that; bygones are bygones. Can't you see you're hurting the lady? [*Pause.*] Well, Dubreuil?

JEAN: Just what is it you want of me, M. Michaud?

MICHAUD: What do I want? Why, absolutely nothing, my boy. As you can see, I have nothing in my hands, nothing in my pockets. There's not even a typewriter. No. It's just that I remembered you without any hard feelings, that's all. And it must be the same with you, since you remember my name.

JEAN: You grilled me for three hours without once beating my face. Maybe that's the reason.

MICHAUD: There. You see? Well, then, how goes it up there? Not too rough?

JEAN: No. It's O.K.

MICHAUD: Fine, fine. You don't get too bored?

JEAN: I work. Making nets.

MICHAUD: You haven't been sentenced yet. You don't have to work.

JEAN: I asked to.

MICHAUD: Well, that's all fine. Actually, you don't have much longer to wait before your trial. It's coming up at the next session.

JEAN: Yes. In February.

LEHIDEUX: . . . And he'll get life as simple as picking a daisy. . . .

MICHAUD: You're a case. What do you know about it? That's what judges are for . . . it's up to them to decide that, not us. [*Pause.*] If he knows how to go about it, Dubreuil might very easily get off with twenty years. Maybe ten.

SIMONE [*heartbroken*]: Twenty years?

LEHIDEUX: Well, what do you expect? Burglary, forceful entry and violence, at night, with people in the house. . . .

They're not likely to give him a medal for that.

SIMONE: But he wasn't the one responsible for the violence.

MICHAUD: That's just what we have no way of knowing, madame. We haven't located his accomplices. So. . . .

JEAN [*ironically*]: Go ahead. I see what you're getting at.

MICHAUD: Well, then, we don't have much to talk about, hunh? Can you think of anything? [*Pause.*] Lehideux, call the guards, then. They're going to take him back. [*Jean stops in the middle of putting a cigarette in his mouth, dumfounded.*] Ask them to make room for you in the car, madame. That way you'll be able to go with him as far as the prison.

JEAN: But . . .

MICHAUD: Hunh?

JEAN: Nothing. [*Pause.*] The guards told me . . .

MICHAUD: Wait a minute, Lehideux. [*To Jean:*] What did the guards tell you?

JEAN: They told me they wouldn't take me back right away. . . . That they'd let us spend a little time together. . . .

MICHAUD: No kidding?

LEHIDEUX: They were stringing you along, pal.

SIMONE: They told me the same thing.

LEHIDEUX: That's a dirty kind of trick. They have a crude idea of practical jokes. Watch me bawl them out for that!

JEAN: It wasn't true, then? [*Pause.*] Is there really no way?

MICHAUD: Let them do it if they want to. But I'd be surprised if they did; they have to turn in a detailed report, with times and all. [*Pause.*] Don't move. We'll ask them. [*He goes to the door.*] Captain! Come here a minute, please. . . . What's this line you gave the prisoner? About leaving him alone with his wife?

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD [*at the door*]: But that's what the . . .

LEHIDEUX [*interrupting him*]: If we turn him over to you now, you take full responsibility?

MICHAUD [*stressing his words*]: If *you* take the responsibility,

it's O.K. with us. That way, it wouldn't be any of our business.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD: Oh, no. I couldn't do that. Nothing doing.

LEHIDEUX [*to Jean*]: You see, what did we tell you?

MICHAUD [*to the captain*]: Well? [*Pause.*] You had no business putting ideas like that in his head. Why, it almost looks as if you get a kick out of it. That's not nice. Not nice at all. It's inhuman.

LEHIDEUX: If you want to do him a favor, that's your business. But if it's only to back out . . .

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD: But I thought that you . . .

LEHIDEUX: So that's it! You thought any promise would be kept, no matter who made it. What if he takes advantage of the occasion and packs off? . . . Kills himself? . . . Strangles his wife? . . . Who'd be in for it? We would, that's who. The favors you promise don't cost you much.

MICHAUD: The fact is . . . [*Seems to have a sudden inspiration.*] But . . . go into the next room with the captain, Lehideux. I'll call you.

[*Lehideux and the captain exit.*]

MICHAUD [*to Jean and Simone, shrugging his shoulders and nodding his head in the direction of the door*]: Imbeciles . . . [*Pause.*] Why shouldn't I do you a favor? It'd be no skin off my neck.

JEAN [*with a glimmer of hope*]: Well?

SIMONE: Oh, please. If it's possible.

MICHAUD: The guards can't, it's true. But there's nothing to prevent *us*. [*Pause.*] And there's a sofa in the next room. [*Pause.*] If I were the only one. . . . But that's the thing. There's my colleague. He hesitates, and it's easy to understand why. He has kids, and a whole career ahead of him.

JEAN: Yeah.

MICHAUD: If only we could be sure you wouldn't do anything crazy. . . .

JEAN: You know me. M. Michaud. You saw what I had to take from your colleagues, as you call them. And you saw that I didn't break down, and that I didn't squeal on anybody. Is my word of honor good enough for you?

MICHAUD: It's fine by me. [*Pause.*] But is it enough for him? That's not so sure. But come on, there no harm in asking him.

SIMONE: Oh, thank you, M. Michaud. Please try.

MICHAUD [*at the door stage right*]: Hey there! Lehideux!

LEHIDEUX [*entering*]: Well?

MICHAUD: Here's how things stand: Dubreuil gives me his word of honor that if we let him go into the next room with his wife, he won't do anything stupid. I'm willing to trust him. [*Pause.*] What do you say?

LEHIDEUX: Are you crazy?

MICHAUD: But after all . . .

LEHIDEUX: But after all! Here's a guy who's capable of anything, with a record as long as your arm; he was caught on a big job, red-handed, all the evidence against him, proved and proved again. So he laughs in your face, refuses to confess anything, let's you go ahead and look for his accomplices without moving a finger, without saying a word to help you. . . . And you feel like doing him favors? Well, don't count on me. I refuse.

[*Michaud makes a face for Jean's benefit.*]

LEHIDEUX [*to Michaud*]: A lot you care. You came along for the ride. "I like Dubreuil" and all that. . . . But I know what I came to . . . [*Continuing without a pause, pretending to cover up the slip he made on purpose.*] No kidding, now. Can you say I'm not right?

JEAN: Bastard!

LEHIDEUX: Hey there, be careful, you! If you want a bust in the jaw, all you have to do is say so.

MICHAUD [*to Lehideux*]: Drop it. [*Pause. To Jean:*] The truth is, Dubreuil, he's right, I can't deny it. You may as well

know the whole story. They gave him a job to do: get your confession. When I heard about it, I came to do what I could to prevent things from getting too rough. That's how things stand.

LEHIDEUX [*violent*]: In other words, it's up to you to choose. Confess and you go to bed with her—excuse me, lady—or shut up and go back in the clink. Is that clear?

MICHAUD: That's it. [*Pause. Jean remains silent.*] Please excuse us, madame, for talking like this in front of you. It'll only take a second. . . . It's up to him. [*Pause.*] Listen, Dubreuil. Do you trust me?

JEAN: So that's why you didn't lay a finger on me while the others were beating me up? There were enough of them for that. They were saving you to win my confidence.

MICHAUD [*in a completely different tone*]: If that's the way you want to take it, O.K. Well, what's your decision?

LEHIDEUX: Confess. It'll only take a minute.

MICHAUD: After all, maybe you don't feel like making love . . .

LEHIDEUX: She doesn't appeal to you. That must be it.

MICHAUD: Can you beat that? He's been stringing us along. He pretended to think he was going to get her without any trouble. But he knew perfectly well that wasn't possible. So he didn't go getting ideas, he was all prepared, and now it's easy for him to say no to us.

LEHIDEUX: All the same, if I hadn't made love for more than a year and knew it would be another twenty years before I could . . .

MICHAUD: Yeah, but we're no judges. We can have it every night. They say that when you go without for a long time, you don't feel so much like it any more.

LEHIDEUX: But still! [*To Jean:*] You like the way she's built? [*He traces a curve in the air, with both hands, and pretends to move his hand up from Simone's stomach to her breasts.*] What about that? . . . And that? . . . It leaves you cold.

SIMONE: Hey, there! Where do you think you are? You're not

the one I married.

[*Out of the corner of his eye, Michaud is watching Jean, who is having trouble holding himself back.*]

LEHIDEUX: Oh, those tits! I better not touch them or there wouldn't be any stopping me. [*Pause.*] So all that really does leave you cold? Those big white breasts under that transparent blouse don't give you ideas? . . . Nor her legs? . . .

MICHAUD: It all leaves him completely cold.

LEHIDEUX: Ah! So that's it! You've turned fairy!

MICHAUD: Well, you know what it's like in stir. . . . [*Michaud holds back Jean, who tries to break loose.*] Hey, now! Keep quiet. Keep quiet, I tell you! Or else I'll beat you quiet. [*He lets him go and pushes him aside with a blow.*]

SIMONE: This is outrageous. But *I*'m not in prison, and I'm not afraid of you! You haven't got anything on me!

LEHIDEUX: Shut up! We'll find something with a little looking.

SIMONE: I'm completely innocent! The investigation proved it!

MICHAUD: That's not the only thing. [*To Jean:*] Explain to her that this is a small town and that a girl who works in a bar is better off if the cops don't have it in for her.

JEAN: Bastards!

SIMONE: Yes, darling. You're right. They are bastards! Cowards! Bastards! Cowards! Bastards!

LEHIDEUX: No need to go looking for charges. [*He goes to the filing cabinet, takes out the typewriter, puts it on the table.*] Defamation of character.

MICHAUD: Drop it. We're wasting time. Listen, Dubreuil. I'm going to explain to you. What is it we're asking of you? We're asking for a confession. You understand: a confession.

JEAN: Don't bother. You may as well give up.

LEHIDEUX: But try to understand what's best for you, for Christ's sake! What do you risk by confessing? Whether

you do or not, you're stuck. The joint where you blew up the safe is one you worked in for three months, last year, under a fake name.

JEAN: How else could I have got a job? It was only by dropping my real name that I stood any chance of being hired. With my list of merit badges . . .

MICHAUD: O.K., let's continue. You and two buddies crack the safe. The watchman comes, you put him out of the way with a shot in the face and a kick in the groin. Not you. One of the other two. And to make sure he stays out, you blackjack him on the back of the head. Tough luck, though: he still had time to snap a mental picture. And he identified you.

JEAN: He must have been pretty good to make me out in the dark.

LEHIDEUX: Say! You weren't there. How do you know it was in the dark?

MICHAUD: Yeah. Answer. How do you know that?

JEAN: Don't you suppose the judge and my lawyer may have touched on the subject? In front of me, too.

LEHIDEUX: Then you must have heard also that your buddy's flashlight—the one who was cracking the safe—lit up your face. From below, naturally.

LEHIDEUX: The watchman gave a detailed description. You had a German army jacket, faded gray-green, with brown camouflage stripes, a gray felt hat pulled down over your eyes, and red rubber gloves.

MICHAUD: You should have used black ones, like an electrician. Red ones are too fragile.

LEHIDEUX: When the watchman came in, he heard you say, "Damn! I've ruined a glove."

MICHAUD: In short, we searched your place and the first things we found were a German jacket, a gray felt hat, two red rubber gloves, one of them torn. . . .

LEHIDEUX: And, poorly hidden, three hundred thousand-franc

bills in bundles of tens and hundreds. Where could they have come from?

JEAN: My luck was good. I'd won on the races.

MICHAUD: That's not true. At the bookie's place you sent us to, not a horse had brought in that much.

JEAN: Not all at once.

LEHIDEUX: You couldn't even name a winner.

MICHAUD: Come on, we're wasting our time. We talked about all that enough when we brought you in. So don't you see, Dubreuil. . . . I know you have it in for me, but I don't care, I'm going to give you some good advice, anyway: confess. The only risk you run is improving your situation.

LEHIDEUX: You're stuck, you're stuck. Be a good loser.

MICHAUD: There's too much evidence against you. If you're stubborn, the court will hold it against you, they'll lower the boom on you, you'll get the maximum.

LEHIDEUX: Whereas if you confess, you'll get off easy. I'll go further, even: we won't press charges.

MICHAUD [*tenderly*]: That's a promise. [*Pause.*] But only if you confess. [*Pause.*] Just look at her, for God's sake. Everyone had dropped you, isn't that so? You sacrificed yourself for your buddies; did they so much as send you packages? Who helped you, except for her? And she deserves credit, poor kid. She's as pretty as a picture; you were living with her; you disappeared over night without a trace. But as soon as she learned where to find you . . .

LEHIDEUX: . . . At the district jail, 1 rue du Château . . .

MICHAUD: . . . She flew to you, as tender and submissive as if nothing had happened.

LEHIDEUX: That sort of thing deserves consideration.

MICHAUD: She marries you. She loves you. She wants you. Just look at her. . . . Isn't it obvious? With a little luck, you might be able to give her a baby in the next hour—and nothing could make her happier than having your baby—that's one thing I know even if you don't. . . .

LEHIDEUX: And you're going to send her away, without even touching her, because of a foolish question of pride?

MICHAUD: That would be a terrible thing to do. It wouldn't be a decent way to treat her. Because it's true. . . . We're not asking you to do anything dishonorable. We're not even asking you for any information about your friends. Confess your part in it and that'll be enough. [*Pause.*] Come on, speak to him, lady. Let's go, Lehideux. [*They go toward the door of the deputy's office.*] You can talk without being disturbed. We'll be there, but we won't be listening to you. [*They go into the deputy's office, but leave the door open and stay in sight. Simone gets close to Jean and moves with him to the opposite side of the stage.*]

JEAN [*stern*]: Is that true, about the baby?

SIMONE: What do you think? I let him go on, that's all.

JEAN: I'm glad. I wouldn't like you to go confiding in a rat like that. [*Pause.*] And, after all, it's not kids that I want you to want. I want you to want me. [*Pause.*] For Christ's sake! What I wouldn't give if we could . . .

SIMONE: I feel that way, too. Oh, Jean. [*Pause.*] But that's no reason for doing something you'd regret.

JEAN: Something I'd regret? I wish I could be sure I would. It's a sacrifice I'd make, no matter how much I wanted you. But as things stand . . .

SIMONE: If it's true that they have all the evidence against you . . .

JEAN: So what? As long as you don't confess, they can't be absolutely sure. A person doesn't lie because he expects to be believed; it's so no one can ever say to you, "That's not true." It makes them think twice.

SIMONE: The lawyer said the same thing they did.

JEAN: Don't talk to me about the lawyer. If I get twenty years, I'll be the one who rots. Not him. And not you, either.

SIMONE: Jean!

JEAN: But it's the truth!

SIMONE: Jean, please. I don't deserve that. [*Pause. She is crying silently, in spite of her efforts not to.*] They've made you mean.

JEAN [*losing patience*]: Oh! That's enough!

SIMONE [*very gently*]: Jean. Even if it's not for my sake, don't talk to me like that. Don't give them that satisfaction. [*Pause. Jean remains stubbornly silent.*] Jean!

JEAN [*gently; he is ashamed*]: You're right. When they get their hands on a man, they make him like them. [*Pause.*] I shouldn't have said that.

SIMONE: You didn't say it.

JEAN: You're so good. You're so sweet. I love you very much, you know that, don't you? Even before we got together again and you did all that, I knew I loved you.

SIMONE: It's a shocking thing to say, but when I heard that you were in prison here, when I understood why you had left me. . . . Oh, I was glad! [*Pause.*] Not for long; right away I began feeling depressed, because you were gone—and not just for a day. But it wasn't a bad way of being depressed.

JEAN: Baby.

SIMONE: Tell me, Jean, is it true? Was it to pull off that job without involving me that you left? You would have come back, wouldn't you? [*Jean remains silent very briefly.*] Don't answer me, darling. In any case, that's what I believe.

JEAN: My own sweet baby. Tell me, have you done what I asked?

SIMONE: Every night. Like you. At the same hour. Except yesterday.

JEAN: Except yesterday. When the clock at Saint-Pierre sounded, I tried to talk to you. And then I began to think about today. And here we are. . . .

SIMONE: Oh Jean. How I love you.

JEAN: Yes. It's a little late to think about giving it up. And

besides, it isn't anyone else's business. I'm not involving anybody but myself.

SIMONE: Jean! Think it over. I won't love you any the less, you know. It's not that important. It's not indispensable.

JEAN: It can't do me much harm, baby. And then, just between you and me, I feel too much like it. [*He goes to the door.*] Hey! Come and get it!

[*Michaud and Lehideux enter.*]

MICHAUD: So that's that! It wasn't so tough after all, was it? [*To Lehideux:*] Will you take his statement? Sit down at the typewriter. [*To Simone:*] Excuse me, madame; would you mind stepping into the next room, just long enough for us to type up a confession? [*He steps out of the way to let her go into the deputy's office.*] Make yourself comfortable; he'll be with you right away. [*Coming back toward Jean.*] O.K., let's get to work, Daddy, and clear this up in a jiffy so you can get to your seventh heaven. [*To Lehideux, who has begun to type the date:*] Are you ready, Lehideux?

LEHIDEUX: Ready. [*To Jean:*] I'm listening.

JEAN: All right, here it is. I'm the one. I'm guilty. I confess all to get it off my conscience.

LEHIDEUX [*typing*]: My name is Dubreuil, Jean, Etienne, Philippe, born on April 21, 1920, at Vannes, Morbihan, now living in the prison of that city. In contradiction to what I previously declared about my part in the robbery committed on January 7, 1951, in the main offices of the French Chemical Products Corporation, I confess my complete guilt in this affair and I acknowledge the misdeeds with which I have been charged. . . . I make this present statement in order to get it off my conscience. Is that all?

JEAN: That's all.

MICHAUD: You see, we didn't make you sweat it out.

LEHIDEUX: . . . After reading over this statement, I remain of the same mind and affix my signature. [*He hands his pen to Jean.*] There. Don't press too hard, you'll ruin the point.

MICHAUD: Well! That's better, don't you agree? You would have regretted not doing it, you know. Whereas now you're going to have yourself a piece, and what a piece at that! That baby of yours looks like a real bundle of fire. [*Pause.*] O.K., go in with her and take your time. It would be a shame to spoil it.

JEAN: Thanks, M. Michaud. [*With his hand on the knob.*] Simone . . .

SIMONE [*opening*]: Jean!

LEHIDEUX [*to Jean*]: Hey! Wait a minute! [*To Simone:*] One moment, lady. [*Simone goes back into the room and shuts the door.*]

JEAN: What else do you want?

LEHIDEUX: Watch the way you talk, do you mind?

MICHAUD: He's right. Just because we're closing our eyes to a lot of things, that's no reason for you to think you can get by with everything.

JEAN: But . . .

LEHIDEUX: No buts. Be polite, and that's all there is to it. You can count yourself lucky . . .

MICHAUD: No kidding! Who do you think you are?

JEAN: Listen. Have a heart. You promised me that, if I talked, I could be with her. I've talked. Let me go to her.

LEHIDEUX: You're in quite a hurry.

JEAN: Quite a hurry? I've been thinking about this for months. For months and months I've been living only for this. . . . That's the only reason we got married. . . .

LEHIDEUX: Well, well . . .

JEAN: And when you take me back, later on, it'll be years before I'll have another chance. Years, with nothing but the time I spend with her today to remind me where the bumps and hollows and creases are; to remind me what it's like to make love; and to dream about it.

LEHIDEUX: Dream, yeah, right in your hand! [*The two inspectors laugh raucously.*]

JEAN: You're made the same way I am, aren't you? Imagine if someone told you, Tonight will be the last time for ten or twenty years. Wouldn't that make you a little impatient?

MICHAUD: The only difference is that *we* haven't done anything to rate losing the right. So we take full advantage of what we have. As I was telling you: every day, and several times. . . .

LEHIDEUX: So that, to put ourselves in your shoes, we have to make one hell of an effort.

JEAN: Don't play cat and mouse like that, just for the fun of watching me sweat. Only free men have watches; I don't have one, and I don't dare ask what time it is, because then I'd know how little time I have. Don't make it even shorter, for God's sake.

LEHIDEUX: The truth is that a sizable chunk of your quarter of an hour of ecstasy has already disappeared.

JEAN: A quarter of an hour! It's not true, tell me, it's not true, is it?

MICHAUD [*looking at his watch*]: No. That's just a way of putting it. You have more than that.

JEAN: Much more?

MICHAUD: Quite a bit more.

JEAN: Well, haven't I kept my word? I've done what I said I would. Let me go to her. [*Pause.*] Please let me go. [*Pause.*] I beg you to let me go. Is that what you want? [*Silence.*] What a fool I am, for Christ's sake! You promised, that's enough. [*He gets up.*] I'm going to her, and that's all there is to it.

MICHAUD [*pushing him back onto his chair*]: Sit down. [*To Lehideux:*] Did you promise something?

LEHIDEUX: Me? Don't remember anything. How about you?

MICHAUD: Absolutely nothing. That's one thing I'm sure of.

JEAN: Ah, the bastards! God, I'm fixed! Ah, the f....g sons of bitches!

MICHAUD: That's no way to talk. You see where it gets you.

[*To Lehideux:*] Well, what are we going to do? If we really want to let them have a minute together, it's time to start thinking about it.

LEHIDEUX: Well . . . I think . . . he's going to be able. . . . [*Pause.*] There's just one thing that isn't clear.

JEAN: What? I confess everything! What else do you need?

MICHAUD [*to Lehideux*]: Let's see his statement. [*He glances over it.*] The fact is that, as it stands, it isn't complete. Wait. Take another sheet of paper. We'll type it over. Ready?

LEHIDEUX: December 16, 1951 . . . go ahead.

MICHAUD [*dictating*]: My name is Dubreuil, Jean, Etienne, Philippe, born on April 12, 1920, at Vannes (Morbihan), now living in the district prison located in that city. . . . [*To Jean:*] That's right, isn't it?

JEAN: Listen . . . I beg you . . . if all you want is to repeat the other one, I'll sign on the bottom and you can fill it in without me. O.K.?

LEHIDEUX: He's got something there. What do you think, Michaud?

MICHAUD: If that's what he wants, I have no objection.

LEHIDEUX [*rolling the paper up in the typewriter*]: After reading over this statement, I remain of the same mind and affix my signature. [*He takes the sheet out.*] There. [*Pause.*] My pen, for Christ's sake! [*To Michaud:*] No! I tell you! [*To Jean:*] Fine. O.K., go ahead. [*Jean gets up.*]

MICHAUD: Don't get excited, you still have quite a bit of time. Not too much, but easily enough. Just one more question. Sit down again. This will only take a second.

JEAN: You're beginning all over again! We agreed you could continue without me.

MICHAUD: But that's one thing we can't make up without you. So how about it: who are your accomplices?

JEAN: Hunh?

MICHAUD [*shouting*]: Who are your accomplices?

LEHIDEUX [*shouting*]: Who are your accomplices? Can't you

hear?

MICHAUD [*shouting*]: Who? Hunh? Who?

LEHIDEUX [*shouting*]: Well? Are you going to tell us, yes or no?

MICHAUD [*shouting*]: But talk, for Christ's sake, talk. [*Pause, then, calmed down*:] And all this time guess who's impatient. Next thing you know she won't feel like it anymore. . . .

LEHIDEUX: Next thing you know you'll have to jump her with one eye on the clock.

MICHAUD: Next thing you know all you can do is give her a kiss and go back to your virgin bunk. . . .

[*Simone opens the door and enters.*]

MICHAUD [*To Simone*]: Will you get the hell out of here? And on the double-quick!

LEHIDEUX: This is strictly for men only.

SIMONE: For men? You flatter yourselves.

MICHAUD [*jumping toward the door, pushing Simone back*]: Are you going to get the hell out? Get the hell out!

SIMONE: Jean! Dirty pig! Jean!

[*Jean gets up. Lehideux makes him sit back down.*]

LEHIDEUX: Come on, now. Careful, there. Stop acting like an idiot, for Christ's sake!

JEAN: Bunch of bastards! F.....g sons of bitches!

LEHIDEUX: Listen, do you want us to lock you up? How would you like us to beat that wedding-day snapshot of the happy groom right into your head? Is that what you want?

JEAN: Stinking pigs! That's what you are, sons of bitches! And if you expect me to say anything else, you can take her away. Bunch of bastards! [*He collapses, with his elbows on the table and his face between his arms, and repats, groaning*:] Bastards! Bastards!

MICHAUD [*coming back, .o Lehideux*]: Boy, what a state she's in! . . . If he won't do it, one of us is going to have to take

care of her just to calm her down.

JEAN [*muffled*]: Bastards! Sons of bitches! Pigs!

LEHIDEUX: You know, it's not funny for a girl to have to wait like that when she feels like it. [*Pause.*] Well, then, have you calmed down? Can we talk?

JEAN: Go to hell.

LEHIDEUX: What's that?. [*He hits the table with his fist, right next to Jean.*]

JEAN: I said, Go to hell.

LEHIDEUX: I'm patient, you know. You're lucky.

JEAN: You're the one who's lucky, you bastard. If only we were on the outside . . .

LEHIDEUX: Oh? You think so? Look who's trying to scare us! Go right ahead, Jack. Don't hold yourself back. You'll see where you're going to wind up. Go on, I'm a sport. Hit me first. [*Jean gets up. Michaud pushes him back onto the chair.*]

MICHAUD: Come on, now, come on.

JEAN [*struggling in vain*]: Ah! If only my muscles weren't shot by the time I've spent behind bars. . . .

LEHIDEUX: Let him go, Michaud. He wants to fight. Well, let him, for Christ's sake!

MICHAUD: Haven't you two shouted at each other long enough? [*Lehideux gives up his fighting attitude slowly and as if regretfully. Michaud shrugs his shoulders and releases Jean, who gathers himself together for a spring. But Michaud remains behind him.*] It's true. You're like two kids. [*Michaud sits down again. Lehideux, too.*] Listen, Dubreuil . . .

JEAN: There's nothing for me to listen to. You promised something if I confessed. Now, you're breaking your promise.

MICHAUD: But that's because, legally, things aren't at all the same anymore.

JEAN: Hunh?

LEHIDEUX: Why, obviously. . . . [*Pause. To Michaud:*] He doesn't understand anything! [*To Jean:*] As long as you hadn't confessed, we regarded you as innocent.

JEAN: What?

MICHAUD: That's the law: every defendant is presumed to be innocent until proved guilty. We thought you were innocent, so we went easy. But now that you are guilty, officially, with signature and everything, we can't overlook anything. We've got to know the whole story.

LEHIDEUX: You've got to tell us everything. We're starting the investigation over again from scratch. [*Pause.*] Well? Your accomplices?

MICHAUD: And don't tell us you met them in a bar, or that you never saw them before. This is serious business.

LEHIDEUX: And don't forget that it's your own time you're wasting. *We're* in no hurry.

MICHAUD [*goes toward the deputy's door*]: Simone! Hey! Simone! No, stay where you are. I just wanted to tell you not to get impatient, he's coming.

LEHIDEUX: Listen, Dubreuil. I think pretty much the same way Michaud does. Basically you're not such a bad type. We yelled at each other, we called each other names, we lost our tempers. . . . I understand you.

MICHAUD: All we ask is for you to understand us, too, Dubreuil. Do you think we enjoy having to torture you like this. Tell me, do you really think we do?

LEHIDEUX: Michaud and I, we'd like to see you go on in and make love with the little woman—she seems to be as nice as they come. Don't you know we'd like to let you have a go at it with her for a while?

MICHAUD: Come on, now. . . . Not to mention the fact that you're not being very nice to her. She has unbuttoned her blouse and is waiting for you. If only you saw how pretty she looks, the poor kid, with her little pink face. [*To Lehideux:*] And those breasts she has! What breasts!

LEHIDEUX [*thoughtfully*]: I can believe it. [*Pause.*] Poor kid! Ah! What lousy luck for her to get a character like you. And she's a real chick . . .

JEAN: Go on. You're doing me a favor. [*Pause.*] Go on talking about her like that and it'll be six months before I have any desire for her.

MICHAUD: And what's it all for? For a bunch of good-for-nothings you think are your buddies, guys you took the rap for and who don't give a good goddamn about you. . . .

LEHIDEUX: Fourteen months they left you in stir . . . without a package, without a penny! If it hadn't been for little Simone, you'd be sunk by now.

MICHAUD: Guys who leave their buddy in stir and don't try to help—that's not what I call human beings, that's what I call bums. Come on, now, say who they are, and I can promise you that before they're locked up I'll see to it for your sake that they won't be very pretty to look at. [*To Lehideux:*] It's the truth. Seeing scum like that take advantage of a good guy makes me sick.

LEHIDEUX: To say nothing of the fact that, at the General Session, the one who'll get put away for being the only one to show up is poor Dubreuil.

JEAN: I don't expect to get off easy.

LEHIDEUX: So? [*Pause. Nothing happens.*] Come on, tell us, you crazy fool. Tell us and go join your little Simone. We've had about enough of this business. . . .

MICHAUD: You can say that again! More than enough!

JEAN: Don't make me laugh! How the hell do you think I feel? [*Pause.*] It makes no difference, there's still one thing I never have been able to understand and that you'd never be able to explain to me. Guys that squeal on their pals . . .

LEHIDEUX: So? You're going to tell us? Who are they? [*Jean gestures impatiently.*]

MICHAUD: No. Let him go ahead. He's supposing.

JEAN: That's it. Supposing . . . a man turns stool pigeon. The

least he can get, in any case, is ten years—providing, even then, that the court [*pompously*] takes into due considerations his revelations. And, during those ten years, how is he going to be treated? Will he dare to walk around wearing that kind of a label in the same prison with them?

LEHIDEUX: Why . . .

JEAN: Here's a guy who has cut himself off from the world of honest people, and there's no way of getting back into it. And now he can't move around in the underworld either with a label like that. Nor when his stretch is up, either. So what? Where do you expect him to go?

LEHIDEUX: What are you getting at?

MICHAUD: He's right. That's a loophole in the law, as the chief says. [*Pause.*] All the same, some things can be arranged.

LEHIDEUX: Naturlich.

MICHAUD: Listen. It's being labeled that scares you. That's right, isn't it?

JEAN: That's not what I said.

MICHAUD: You didn't say it, but that's what is, anyway. [*Jean starts up.*] Here's what we're going to do. . . . Lehideux will go along with this. . . . Here's what we're going to do: We won't make this confession official. We'll stick to the first one. And you give us the dope, strictly in private, with no receipt. No traces. We didn't ask you for anything, you didn't tell us anything, everybody's happy. Isn't that so, Lehideux?

LEHIDEUX: It's not as good as having a written, signed statement.

MICHAUD: It's not as good as having a statement, but we'll accept it as good enough. [*Pause. To Jean*:] A little while ago, you gave me your word of honor as a man and I trusted you. Now I give you my word of honor as a policeman. O.K.?

JEAN: Bunch of nitwits. You're not even one damn bit concerned to understand what a person says to you. I was talk-

ing philosophy. And you thought I was making you a proposition. Christ! How dumb can you be?

LEHIDEUX: That's your last word?

MICHAUD: You're absolutely sure? Well, this time, I'm warning you in advance, you can count on at least two months flat on your back. You've made fools of us long enough. Ready, Lehideux? [*All three get up.*]

JEAN [*shouting*]: Simone! [*The two inspectors hurl themselves upon him to make him shut up.*] Out the window! Call help! Out the window!

LEHIDEUX: Damn it all! Hold him! [*He springs into the deputy's office. We hear Simone scream.*] I'll shut her up, the bitch! [*We hear him getting her away from the window. He shouts:*] That's enough! Shut up! [*He returns. To Michaud:*] Come on, let him go. [*To Jean:*] Well? Stubborner than a mule? Churchill's nothing next to you, eh? Do you want me to tell you something, Dubreuil? You're an ass. [*Pause. Questioning look at Michaud, who nods his head to show he's ready to go along.*] O.K. Go to her. [*Jean doesn't understand.*] Come on, jump. Are you deaf?

JEAN: It's not true.

LEHIDEUX: Yes, it is so true. And do you know why? It's because just the thought of asking you one more question makes my head ache. Come on. Go to it. . . . [*Exit Jean. To Michaud:*] He wouldn't have talked, anyway.

MICHAUD: Probably not. . . . [*Pause.*] In any case, I'm like you: I've had my fill of it. Why should we kill ourselves on this job?

LEHIDEUX: You're right. A man can take only so much.

MICHAUD: I'm going to see what he's up to all the same. What if they tried to put one over on us?

LEHIDEUX: There's a hole along the edge of the door. I've loosened the paper a little. [*Pause. Michaud looks.*] Well? What are they doing? Getting hot?

MICHAUD [*bent double with laughter, moves away from the*

door]: They're crying. Both of them. Like kids.

LEHIDEUX: Is that what we paid for? What the hell! After all that headache. And then when it comes to a little fun—nothing doing! [*He goes to the door, looks. Michaud moves his head as if asking a question. Lehideux gestures no. Michaud, disappointed, guffaws a little anyway. There is a knock at the door. The captain of the guard and the guard enter.*]

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD: Gentlemen, it is three o'clock.

LEHIDEUX: Say, there, Michaud. We didn't even notice the time slipping away.

MICHAUD: No. I wouldn't have thought it was so late. [*To the captain of the guard*:] He's in there. Bring him out. We'll keep the girl. We'll let her leave a little later.

LEHIDEUX: If we don't do that, she's going to cause trouble. . . .

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD [*noisily opening the door to the deputy's office*]: Everybody up in here! Off we go! [*He goes in, followed by his guard. Noise of a scuffle. The two guards come out dragging Jean, who is struggling. Simone is pushed back and held in the doorway by the inspectors.*]

JEAN: Let me go! Let me go!

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD: Come on, now! Come on! Restrain yourself!

SIMONE [*screaming*]: Jean! Jean! I love you! I'll appeal! Jean! I'm your wife! . . .

MICHAUD: Wife? Well, after a fashion. Don't get excited.

SIMONE: Jean! I love you! [*She screams without stopping to the end.*]

JEAN [*already dragged outside the office*]: Simone! Simone!

LEHIDEUX: He's putting up quite a fight. Tough guy. . . .

MICHAUD [*disgusted*]: No dignity! One's as bad as the other.

CURTAIN

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET is the young leader of the *"Littérature objective"* movement in French fiction. He was awarded the *Prix des critiques* in 1955. A translation of his novel *Le Voyeur* will be published later in the year by Grove Press.

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